THE WORLD AT WAR
1939–45

25 APR 1957

Edgar Holt

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PUBLIC
2 5 APR 1957

PUTNAM
42 Great Russell Street
London

First published 1956

THIS BOOK

is intended to tell the story of the Second World War for those who are too young to remember much or anything about it, but are constantly coming across references in books and conversation to men and events of those fateful years. It is dedicated to those

> Fathers who like so many Alexanders
> Have in these parts from morn till even fought
> And sheathed their swords for lack of argument.

Made in Great Britain. Printed at the St Ann's Press
Park Road, Altrincham.

2 5 APR 1957

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CHAPTER 1

HOW IT BEGAN

At 11.15 on Sunday morning, September 3, 1939, the B.B.C. programmes were interrupted for a broadcast by Neville Chamberlain, then Prime Minister of Great Britain. He announced that Hitler had not replied to the British Government's ultimatum sent two-and-a-quarter hours earlier and that Britain and Germany were therefore at war.

Fifteen minutes later London heard its first air-raid warning—that wailing sound of a siren which was soon to be well known all over the country. Many Londoners thought that Hitler had not wasted much time.

In fact, the Germans had not begun the war as rapidly as that. The air-raid warning was a mistake. The aeroplane which had set the sirens wailing was soon identified as a friendly one, and the long note of the "All clear" signal told Londoners that they were not yet threatened by German bombs. But why was there any fear of bombs at all? What had gone wrong with the world?

"It is the evil things that we shall be fighting against—brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution—and against these I am sure that right will prevail." These were Chamberlain's words in his broadcast.

Yet less than a year earlier this same Prime Minister had come home from his third meeting with Hitler—the Munich meeting—to tell the cheering crowds outside No. 10, Downing Street: "This is the second time in

our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honour. I believe it is peace for our time."

Chamberlain was comparing himself with Disraeli, the Victorian statesman, who was said to have brought back "peace with honour" from the Berlin conference after the Russo-Turkish war. Peace lasted a long time after Disraeli's home-coming. Chamberlain's forecast was proved to be wildly wrong. Future generations may well wonder how a Prime Minister could talk about "peace for our time" less than a year before he was obliged to lead his country into war.

The explanation is simply that Hitler, the German *Fuehrer* (leader), deliberately made the Second World War, and that in 1938 Chamberlain and his intimate circle of advisers had not even begun to understand Hitler's true character. In 1939 they understood, but nothing could then be done to curb Hitler's lust for conquest. The only choice was either to give in to Hitler or to fight him. We fought.

Hitler made the war. There is no doubt about that. Historians of the First World War may hesitate to put the entire blame for its outbreak on the German Emperor, Wilhelm II, since there was such a tangle of international rivalries in 1914 and it was Austria's quarrel with Serbia (now Yugoslavia) which really started the shooting. The Second World War was unmistakably Hitler's handiwork. The only argument about its origin is whether the sole responsibility lies with Hitler and the Nazi leaders, or whether the German people share it for having helped Hitler to gain power although it was always clear that he meant to lead them into a war of revenge.

Many Germans to-day would like to put all the blame on the Nazis. It is certainly hard to understand how the

charming and friendly Germans whom we meet in peace-time could be responsible for launching a brutal war designed to enslave the free peoples of the world. Unfortunately the Germans have a boundless capacity for following a leader. They followed Hitler in the nineteen-thirties.

Hitler made the war. But who was Hitler, and who were the Nazis? Oddly enough, Hitler was not even a German. He was an Austrian, born in 1889 in the little town of Braunau on the River Inn, where his father was a customs official. As a youth he had tried, and failed, to enter the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, and before the First World War he had worked in Vienna and Munich, sometimes as a casual labourer, sometimes as a house-painter. During that war he served with a Bavarian regiment for four years on the Western Front and rose to the rank of corporal. When the war ended there was nothing to suggest that Hitler would ever emerge from humble obscurity.

Yet a strange flame—one that must surely be called genius, even though it was turned to such evil uses—burned in this ex-corporal Adolf Hitler with the strident voice and the small black moustache. It took him swiftly into politics, gave him a prominent place in a newly-formed German People's Party which was soon to become the National Socialist (Nazi) Party, and made him this party's *Fuehrer* within three years of the end of the war.

Already he showed that personal magnetism which allowed him to sway crowds at first and later a whole nation. Already he displayed his mystical devotion to German greatness. When he was imprisoned in a fortress for his part in an unsuccessful revolt he devoted his time to setting down his political philosophy in a long (and long-winded) book which he called *Mein Kampf* ("My

Struggle"). There, in black and white, were his views on propaganda and the advantage of telling "big lies", his doctrines of aggression and German world domination and his racial hatred of Jews which he carried to such horrible lengths during the Second World War.

Above all, *Mein Kampf* was a blueprint for a war of aggression, and it was astonishing how little serious attention was paid to it in other countries after Hitler had become the German Chancellor. People still wondered what he would do next, though in fact he had written it all down years before. As Aneurin Bevan said in another context in later years, "Why look in the crystal when you can read the book?"

The Nazi Party grew in stature after Hitler's release from the fortress. It attracted more and more voters in German elections, though it had temporary set-backs. Its success was assured in 1933, when the aged President of the German Republic, Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, invited Hitler to become Chancellor. From then it was only a brief step to Hitler's seizure of supreme power on Hindenburg's death.

Other countries now realised that they must take him seriously, and his principal colleagues also came into the world's limelight. Outstanding among the others were Goering and Goebbels.

Goering, Hitler's right-hand man and the secret creator of the new German Air Force (the *Luftwaffe*), seemed to some extent a figure of fun. Though he had been an air ace in the First World War, he had grown fat in peace-time and was jovial and fond of display. Many jokes were made about his love of medals, and his apparent geniality won him a number of English friends before the war. The geniality was largely a mask. Goering was as brutal as any of the Nazis, and was the

originator of Germany's terrible concentration camps.

Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, was also a slightly comic figure—a dark, little man with a club-foot, a skilful juggler of truth and falsehood, the husband of a beautiful actress and reputedly a great pursuer of other women. Goebbels had as big a hand as anyone's in framing the worst excesses of Hitler's policy.

Hitler, Goering and Goebbels were the leading Nazi trio, but other names became familiar as time went on, particularly those of Streicher, a notorious "Jew-baiter", and Himmler, who was head both of Hitler's private army, the *Schutz Staffeln* (S.S.), and of the Gestapo, Hitler's secret police. Behind an apparently mild exterior Himmler concealed an unlimited capacity for cruelty. He was the Nazis' torturer, hangman and executioner, but in the end, like Hitler, Goering and Goebbels, he avoided punishment for his crimes by committing suicide.

As Germany's *Fuehrer* after Hindenburg's death, Hitler was able to play for high political stakes. His first aim was to get rid of the Treaty of Versailles, which Germany had signed with the Western Allies after the First World War.

This treaty, drawn up in 1919, was intended to make it impossible for Germany ever to go to war again. Besides presenting her with a big bill for war reparations to the Western Allies, it abolished compulsory military service in Germany and restricted her Army to 100,000 men, severely limited her Navy and prohibited the creation of any military Air Force. To give Western Europe even more security the Rhineland—the German territory between the Rhine and France—was declared a demilitarised zone, which no German troops were allowed to enter. Germany also lost Alsace-Lorraine and part of Silesia, and had to give Poland a small strip

of territory (known as the Polish Corridor) running up to the sea and cutting off East Prussia from the rest of Germany. The former German port of Dantzig was made a Free City.

At the same time the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had been Germany's Ally in the First World War, disappeared. Austria became a small country, Hungary was separate and independent, and much of the former Empire's territory went to Yugoslavia and the new country of Czechoslovakia. One part of Czechoslovakia was inhabited by people called the Sudeten Germans, though they were not, and never had been, real Germans. The world was to hear a lot about them in 1938.

Hitler was on curiously favourable ground in attacking the Treaty of Versailles. Soon after it had been signed a Cambridge economist, J. M. Keynes (later Lord Keynes), wrote a brilliant though mistaken book called *The Economic Consequences of the Peace Treaty*, which left its numerous readers with the impression that Germany had been harshly and unfairly treated. This impression had become widespread in Britain in the nineteen-twenties, with the result that many people felt that sooner or later the treaty would have to be ended or mended. This feeling was encouraged by Germany's adoption of a democratic regime after the First World War, and even when Hitler had demolished that regime he had many sympathisers in his condemnation of the Versailles Treaty.

Hitler's first sign of his aggressive intentions was to withdraw from the League of Nations, the international organisation which had been set up in 1919. He began to rearm Germany in secret, and soon felt powerful enough to impose conscription openly and to flaunt the Air Force he had created in defiance of the Versailles

Treaty. A naval agreement with Britain allowed him to build a bigger Navy, though Germany had already shown her ingenuity by building so-called "pocket battleships", powerful warships which fell neatly within the limitations that Versailles had imposed on her. With a growing Regular Army behind him, as well as the uniformed "shock troops" (*Sturm Abteilungen*, or S.A.) of the Nazi Party, Hitler then sent troops into the demilitarised Rhineland. Neither Britain nor France took military action to drive them out.

Then, in 1937, came Hitler's first big venture outside Germany. His tanks and armoured cars rolled into Vienna, and Austria was forced to unite with Germany, though a popular vote had shown that her people wished to maintain her independence. The stage was now set for the Czechoslovakian drama of 1938 and 1939.

In spite of Hitler's many breaches of the Versailles Treaty, and in spite of his savage oppresion of Jews and political opponents in his own country, the British Government had done its best to keep on good terms with him. It had negotiated the naval agreement with his Ambassador in London, Joachim von Ribbentrop, a conceited and bungling diplomat who was formerly a champagne salesman. It had begun, in fact, the notorious policy of "appeasement"—the policy of trying to soothe and buy off a potential enemy by making concessions to him and raising no practical opposition to his acts of aggression towards other countries.

Those who believed in appeasement thought it especially necessary in view of the close alliance between Hitler and Italy's Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. Italian Fascism, like German National Socialism, was a system of government under which personal human values and individual interests were entirely subordinate to the State, which was headed by an all-powerful

dictator. Mussolini, a former Socialist, had seized power in Italy in 1922, and although he was a bombastic and even a ludicrous figure it was generally believed that Italy had become a more efficient country under his rule. (The popular theory that he had made Italian trains run punctually for the first time in their history is not, however, borne out by the facts. They were as unpunctual as ever under the Mussolini regime.)

Mussolini had invented a special Fascist salute for his countrymen. Hitler had followed suit by introducing a Nazi salute and the Nazi watchword "Heil Hitler", which took the place of all social and official greetings. Clearly the two men had much in common, but Mussolini was not a serious threat to Britain. Yet some people thought he could be a grave danger in the Mediterranean if he were not carefully handled, and so there had been no interference when he invaded and conquered Albania and extended Italy's African Empire by attacking and seizing Abyssinia.

The alliance between Hitler and Mussolini had led to the formation in 1936 of what was called the Rome-Berlin Axis. Thereafter the "appeasers" thought not only of what Germany or Italy might do if provoked, but of what "the Axis" might do. About this time the Axis Powers took the opportunity of trying out their latest weapons by sending help to General Franco, the Spanish Nationalist leader, in his successful civil war against the Spanish Socialist-Communist Government.

The years of 1938 and 1939 revealed the tragic folly of appeasement. In 1938 Hitler started a clamorous campaign for the transfer of the Sudeten Germans—and the territory they lived in—from Czechoslovakia to Germany. After violent speeches in which he threatened war if he did not get what he wanted Hitler agreed to discuss his claims with Neville Chamberlain, who was

deeply concerned about the possible outbreak of a European war.

Chamberlain saw Hitler three times in September—first, at Berchtesgaden, Hitler's Bavarian home, then at Bad Godesberg, on the Rhine, and finally at Munich, where they were joined by Daladier, the French Prime Minister, and Mussolini. (Czechoslovakia was not represented.) Here the British and French Premiers were outmanoeuvred and agreed that Hitler should take over the Sudeten Germans' territory, on condition that the rest of Czechoslovakia should keep its independence.

This was the conference from which Chamberlain took away Hitler's promise never to make war against Britain—the promise that inspired him to say he had brought back "peace for our time". This was the conference that many people in Britain hailed joyfully, because it had lifted the threat of war, though very soon, when its hollow sham was exposed, the word "Munich" became a term of reproach, and Chamberlain and his Cabinet colleagues were derisively called "the men of Munich" by their political enemies.

Chamberlain had meant well, but he knew nothing of foreign politics and he had spurned the advice of the experts. The illusion of peace did not last long. In the following Spring Hitler sent his troops into the rest of Czechoslovakia, which chose to surrender without a struggle rather than face certain destruction. Germany had swallowed another free country.

This time even Chamberlain realized that Hitler's word was not to be trusted. Britain, who had allowed her armed forces to become dangerously weak between the wars, now knew that she must hurry on with rearmament.

Hitler was not prepared to wait until Britain had rearmed. His bloodless seizure of Austria and Czecho-

slovakia had whetted his appetite. Poland was next on his list. He demanded a *German* Corridor through the *Polish* Corridor, so that East Prussia would again be joined to the rest of Germany. He insisted that Dantzig must be German once more. He made it clear that he would attack Poland if she did not yield to his demands.

A German war with Poland meant a European war, for Britain and France, who had stood by while Czechoslovakia died, had pledged themselves to support Poland if she were invaded. Since both countries knew that it was technically impossible for them to give armed help to Poland, they tried to enlist Soviet Russia's support in a "collective security" plan to avert war.

Russia had other plans. The Soviet dictator, Josef Stalin, was a cold and calculating politician who held the Marxist view that Communism must eventually destroy the capitalist countries. His policies were entirely guided by his views of Communist interests. In the past he had frequently hurled insults at Hitler, and Hitler had promptly returned them. Yet the Communist and the Nazi States were very similar in their complete suppression of political opposition, their restrictions of personal freedom, their use of secret police to intimidate the population and the concentration of all power in the hands of a ruling clique. It was not really surprising that Hitler and Stalin should form a temporary alliance. Yet the whole world was amazed to hear that a Russo-German non-aggression pact had been signed in Moscow on August 24.

Now Hitler had a free hand to attack Poland without fear of any interference by Soviet Russia. He wasted no time. Poland was bullied and threatened, while the British and French Ambassadors in Berlin made desperate efforts to stave off the coming conflict. But the British Ambassador, Sir Nevile Henderson, had been

sent to Berlin to carry out Chamberlain's "appeasement" policy. He was powerless to check Hitler when no further "appeasement" was possible.

Hitler pretended to give Poland a chance of reaching a peaceful settlement, but in the end he attacked her before she had had time to answer his last ultimatum. There was no declaration of war. At dawn on Friday, September 1, 1939, German tanks crossed the Polish frontier and German bombs shattered the Polish airfields, almost wiping out the whole of the Polish Air Force.

This was the hour for which Hitler had long prepared. At 9.30 p.m. on September 1, and again at 9 a.m. on September 3, Britain sent messages to Hitler calling for the immediate withdrawal of the German forces in Poland. The second message was an ultimatum. It was not answered.

Britain and France were now bound to declare war on Germany. Where Britain led the way for freedom's sake the Dominions were proud to follow, and with the sole exception of the Irish Free State (as Eire was then called) they were all at Britain's side within the next few days. The Second World War had begun.

CHAPTER II

BRITAIN AT WAR

CHAMBERLAIN'S announcement and the first air-raid warning did not really take Britain by surprise. War had seemed fairly likely ever since Hitler had seized the whole of Czechoslovakia. In May, 1939, a limited form of compulsory military service had been introduced: young men of 20 were then called up for military training. As soon as war broke out the National Service (Armed Forces) Act was passed by Parliament, making all men between the ages of 18 and 41 liable for service with the Army, Navy or Air Force.

Many preparations had been made for protecting the civilian population against bombing. Gas-masks had been issued to everyone shortly before the Munich Agreement of 1938, since it was assumed that Germany would drop poison-gas bombs on Britain. (This assumption was quite wrong, for poison-gas was not used in any war operations, though the Germans used it extensively in their concentration camps.) In 1939 a Government pattern of air-raid shelter was put on sale to the public. This was a small steel hut, big enough to hold three or four people, which could be put up in a yard or garden. It was called the Anderson shelter, because Sir John Anderson was the Home Secretary who introduced it. Later in the war a different type of shelter, adapted for use indoors, was introduced by Herbert Morrison, then Minister of Home Security, and became known as the Morrison shelter.

The public air-raid shelters available in 1939 were quite insufficient for the population's later needs, and had to be supplemented by many more shelters and (in London) by the use of tube-stations; but a civil defence service had been in operation for some time. Britain was already familiar with the initials A.R.P., which stood for air-raid precautions by and on behalf of the civilians. That summer, weeks before the outbreak of war, the Government had been making plans for trial "black-outs", in which all house lights would have to be completely shielded by curtains, street lights would be extinguished and motor headlamps would be masked so as to throw only small beams of light invisible from the air.

It was the signing of the German-Russian non-aggression pact which made Britain realise that war was very near. Members of Parliament, who had been taking their summer holiday, were recalled to Westminster, where Chamberlain told them : "Peace or war does not rest with us. I hope that those on whom the responsibility does rest will think of the millions of human lives whose fate depends on their action."

The next day the United States Ambassador in London advised American travellers to leave England at once. The West Indians' cricket tour was abruptly cut short, leaving five matches unplayed, and the cricketers sailed for Montreal on August 26. British holiday-makers rushed home from the Continent. Croydon airport had the heaviest traffic it had ever experienced. People began to talk about evacuation from big cities, and on August 28 London schoolchildren rehearsed the procedure which was to take them away from London to safer places if war began. Many London business firms moved the greater part of their staffs to the country or the seaside.

By the end of the month kerbs and road centres in most towns and cities had been painted white, to guide motorists and pedestrians in the coming black-out. Householders began to stick strips of gummed paper on windows to reduce the danger from flying glass splinters if they were smashed in an air-raid. Black-out curtain materials were eagerly bought in the shops, and sandbags, which were used for barricading houses and business premises against the effects of bomb blast, went up in price from 2½d. to 4d. or 5d. each.

The news of Hitler's attack on Poland set the full British war machinery in motion. The Navy was mobilised, and the Services as a whole were made as ready as their inadequate numbers would allow them to be. The evacuation of London's schoolchildren and old and infirm people began on September 1, and more than 1,000,000 were moved to safer areas on that day. Art treasures were taken from famous galleries to country houses. Food hoarding was prohibited; B.B.C. broadcasts were reduced to two wave-lengths only, and the weather forecasts, which would have given valuable information to enemy airmen, were not heard again until the end of the war. Then, on Saturday, September 2, people waited resignedly for further news.

On the same day on which Chamberlain announced that Britain was at war, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States, said that a proclamation of United States neutrality was being prepared. In retrospect it seems astonishing that the Americans, who had fought at Britain's side in the closing years of the First World War and were soon to fight at her side again during and after Hitler's war, should have stood aloof in 1939 when Britain was in grave peril. Yet British people were not surprised at the time.

In the years which followed the First World War the

United States had drawn away from Europe. She had refused to join the League of Nations, even though her own President, Woodrow Wilson, was largely responsible for its creation. Many of her politicians had adopted a policy of isolationism, which meant that the United States should stand alone and decline to be involved in other countries' affairs. In particular, these politicians insisted, the U.S. must avoid "European entanglements".

It was fortunate for Britain that Roosevelt, who had first become President in 1933 and was now in his second four-year term of office, was more far-seeing and internationally-minded than most American politicians were at that time. He was a warm friend of Britain, though his friendship was limited in one direction by his opposition to "British Imperialism"—an opposition which unhappily caused him to favour Stalin at Churchill's expense in some of the inter-Allied negotiations towards the end of the war. Even with this reservation, war-time Britain owed a big debt to Franklin D. Roosevelt.

He was a remarkable man. At the outbreak of war he was 57 years old. Eighteen years earlier his promising political career appeared to have been cut short when he contracted what was then known as infantile paralysis and was later more usually described as "polio" or poliomyelitis. But Roosevelt was unconquerable. He said to his wife, "I'll beat this thing," and in seven years he had so far restored his physique that he was able to re-enter politics and be elected Governor of New York State. Although for the rest of his life he had to walk with the aid of sticks or be carried in a wheel-chair, this former "polio" victim became one of the world's greatest statesmen. It was due to his wise and tactful guidance of the American people that the United

States, which was firmly resolved to be neutral in 1939, gradually came to interpret neutrality as meaning "all aid for Britain short of war". But more than two years were to pass before the U.S. actually joined Britain in arms.

Yet on that very first day of the war 28 American citizens lost their lives. They were passengers in the British liner, *Athenia.*

Britain did not have to wait long for proof that the war had begun in the West and was not confined to Poland. At 5 p.m. on September 3 France joined Britain in declaring war on Germany. Four hours later the *Athenia* was torpedoed without warning in the Atlantic by a German submarine, with a total death-roll of 112.

This attack by a U-boat (*Untersee-boot*), as German submarines were usually called, was to some extent a mistake. The German high command had not at that time ordered its U-boat commanders to wage the unrestricted warfare on merchant shipping which had been a familiar feature of the First World War. The U-boat which sank the *Athenia* had "jumped the gun".

The Germans tried to disclaim responsibility: their radio propaganda asserted that Churchill, who had become First Lord of the Admiralty, had arranged for a bomb to be placed on board the *Athenia,* in order to discredit the Germans and prejudice their relations with the United States. This was one of Goebbels's most remarkable propaganda efforts. In fact, the U-boat commander's confession that he torpedoed the Athenia was among the innumerable documents presented at the Nuremberg trials of German war criminals in 1945–46.

In this first week-end of the war the Polish armies were rapidly falling back before the German onslaught. If fully mobilised, they could have put 30 divisions into the field, but they had no chance against Germany

because of their lack of aircraft and motorised forces and the weakness of their artillery. Poland's allies, Britain and France, could send her no assistance. They could only watch while Hitler added another country to his list of conquests.

Yet there was one way of helping Poland which seemed to be open to Britain and France. Many people expected them to open a campaign in the West and force Hitler to fight on two fronts.

This was hardly practicable. Britain could not take the initiative in such an attack, since at that time and for long afterwards she had only a small Army and little armoured strength; and France had no intention of launching an offensive since her whole military policy between the wars had been directed towards defensive planning.

Inspired by André Maginot, a First World War general who became French War Minister in the nineteen-twenties, she had built up on her German frontier a strong line of fortifications called the Maginot Line. Behind these forts and strong-points she thought she was safe from German attack, though in fact the Maginot Line was very far from being a guarantee of security. When completed in 1936, it ran from Montmédy, in the department of Meuse, to Belfort, 275 miles south-east of Paris. But it had never been extended from Montmédy to the English Channel, with the result that a huge gap was left for the invasion of France through Holland and Belgium.

Because France felt secure behind her reputedly impregnable defences, she had no wish to challenge Hitler by fighting in front of them. Before the war was over much justified scorn was heaped on what came to be known as " Maginot Line mentality ".

In any case, Hitler had the advantage of having made

full preparations before the outbreak of war. France had not done so. It would have been technically impossible for her to have mounted an offensive before the middle of September. By that time Poland was beaten.

Even in the air Britain and France did not attack. France was afraid that bombing raids on Germany might lead to reprisals against her unprotected war factories. So British bombers flew over Germany dropping nothing more deadly than propaganda leaflets, hopefully designed to teach the Germans how wrong they were to make war.

While German aircraft rained bombs on Poland, and German armoured columns drove back the Polish armies in a great pincer movement soon to close in central Poland, British people accustomed themselves to many changes in civilian life. A National Register was introduced: as a safeguard against the infiltration of spies or parachutists, everyone had to fill up a registration form and was then issued with an identity card. This card had to be kept in pocket or handbag and immediately produced for official purposes or at the request of a policeman.

Though no bombs of any kind had yet fallen on Britain, the authorities were still afraid of poison-gas raids: people were told to take their gas-masks with them wherever they went, and thousands of these masks were daily left behind in trains, buses, trams and restaurants. Cinemas and theatres, which had been closed altogether at the outbreak of war, were soon allowed to re-open, but special closing-times were fixed by Government order.

Road accidents increased alarmingly owing to the black-out, and on September 13 the Government announced that pedestrians could use hand-torches when they went out at night. Strict rules had to be observed.

The torches had to be dimmed by having two thicknesses of tissue paper placed over the bulb, the light had always to be projected downwards, and all torches were to be put out as soon as an air-raid warning was heard.

Half-way through September the advance guards of the British Expeditionary Force landed in France. But this news seemed of minor importance while Britain's ally, Poland, was reeling to defeat in Hitler's first *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war). Warsaw was still holding out in spite of the fearful bombing inflicted on it, but Poland's fate was settled on September 17, when Soviet Russia, in accordance with a secret agreement made with Hitler at the time of the German-Russian non-aggression pact, sent her own troops across the Polish frontier to occupy the eastern half of the country. This had been Russia's price for remaining neutral while Hitler made war on Poland and the West.

For a little while Poland fought on, though cruelly attacked from both sides. General Anders, a great Polish soldier who later fought with the Western Allies in Italy, was wounded twice on one day—in fighting the Germans in the morning and in fighting the Russians in the afternoon. But by September 28 the last Polish armies had surrendered, and Hitler made a triumphant entry into bombed and shattered Warsaw.

In rather less than a month Germany had added her first war conquest to her pre-war spoils of Austria and Czechoslovakia. In the same period she had struck her first blow at the British Navy by sinking the aircraft-carrier, *Courageous*, in the Bristol Channel. This was an old ship, but was still useful. She was torpedoed by a U-boat, and Captain Makeig-Jones, who went down with his ship, was one of 500 who lost their lives out of a crew of 1,260.

Though Britain was indignant at Russia's betrayal of Poland, Churchill already foresaw the break-up of the Russo-German alliance. In one of his earliest war broadcasts he declared that "Russia has pursued a cold-blooded policy of self-interest", but he far-sightedly added: "We may discern quite plainly the community of interests which exists between England, France and Russia to prevent the Nazis carrying the flame of war into the Balkans and Turkey." Nearly two years had still to pass before that "community of interests" was to take practical shape.

The five months after the defeat of Poland were the period which the French called "*drôle de guerre*", the Germans "*Sitzkrieg*" (sitting war) and the British "phoney war". Economically and socially Britain was certainly at war. Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, had brought in the first war-time Budget, raising income tax from 5*s.* 6*d.* in the £ to 7*s.* (This was only a beginning. In 1941 income tax went up to 10*s.* in the £ and stayed at that level till 1946.) Indirect taxes on sugar, tobacco, beer, spirits and wines were all increased, and petrol supplies were strictly controlled, so that fewer private cars were seen on the roads. Children were still being evacuated to safe areas, though many of the original evacuees soon began to drift home again. Black-out rules were strictly enforced: a 19-year-old girl was sentenced to a month's imprisonment because she repeatedly flashed her torch during black-out hours in a way that was not allowed by the regulations, and another girl was fined £2 because she had left a light showing in her bedroom after she had "made up" in a hurry to go to a cinema.

These were the side-issues of war, but little was happening with regard to the major issues. Fighting was limited to unimportant activity on the Western Front,

and to the occasional swoop of a U-boat on a merchant vessel. One U-boat which had sunk a Greek steamer landed the survivors on the coast of Eire.

In these months Hitler made his first tentative attempts to persuade Britain and France to stand aside and leave him to pursue a policy of piecemeal conquest. In a *Reichstag* (German Parliament) speech early in October he outlined vague peace proposals, but Western commentators noted that he offered no righting of wrongs, no reparation for the harm he had done. This was the way with all Hitler's peace offers. They were all based on the principle that Germany should keep what she had won by brute force.

Britain had been shocked to hear of the sinking of the *Courageous*. But worse was soon to come. On October 14 a U-boat penetrated the defences of Scapa Flow, the main base for the Royal Navy, and torpedoed the battleship, *Royal Oak*, as she lay there at anchor. The feat was so daring and unexpected that both the admiral and the captain on board the *Royal Oak* thought that the impact of the U-boat's first torpedo must have been caused by an internal explosion. So the U-boat had time to re-load and fire a further round of torpedoes, which sent the great battleship to the bottom in less than two minutes. Few of the crew below decks had any chance of escaping.

After this disaster Churchill moved the Fleet away from Scapa Flow until the defences against both U-boat and air attack could be strengthened. For a few months the Fleet was based in the Firth of Clyde, but it returned to Scapa Flow in March, 1940.

A minor sensation of this winter was an apparent attempt to assassinate Hitler in Munich. A bomb exploded in a beer-cellar—the Buergerbrau—on the evening when Hitler was addressing the old comrades of the

Nazi movement. Several Party members were killed, and others were injured, but Hitler himself had left the hall a few minutes before the explosion occurred.

Many people in Britain greeted the news of the attempted assassination with scepticism. The doubters were quite right. The whole affair had been organised by the Gestapo with the object of boosting Hitler's popularity in Germany. It was carefully arranged that the bomb would not explode until Hitler was out of harm's way.

Himmler, the Gestapo chief, tried to implicate Britain in his bogus plot against Hitler by claiming that two British Secret Service agents, whom the Germans had kidnapped on the Dutch frontier, were involved in it. These two men had nothing whatever to do with the explosion, and though Himmler threatened to put them on trial he never ventured to do so. He was doubtless afraid that too many of his own secrets might have been revealed if the case came into court.

As the war drifted on from October to November British people seemed more concerned about the conduct of child evacuees than about a Western Front on which there was virtually no action. "Evacuee stories" were as numerous as "bomb stories" were to become a year or two later. Most of them turned on the inability of the town children to settle down in their country billets, on their astonishment at not being given chips for supper, and on the country-dwellers' shocked discovery that many of the children were verminous. A typical story was that of a six-year-old who demanded pickles, cheese and beer for supper. When he was curtly refused he said to the woman in whose house he was staying: "You can't talk to me like that! You're being *paid* to keep me!"

At the same time the stream of parent and child

evacuees back to the towns was causing trouble. Many town schools had been handed over to the A.R.P. service for civil defence purposes, and local authorities had to improvise arrangements for educating the children who had returned.

Already the British Government was looking round for new ways of paying for the war. Lord Keynes, the author of *Economic Consequences of the Peace Treaty*, wrote two newspaper articles outlining a new taxation scheme which was later adopted under the name of "post-war credits"; but the time for resorting to that device had not yet come. On November 21 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the introduction of 15*s*. National Savings Certificates, rising in value to £1 0*s*. 6*d*. in ten years, and National Defence Bonds giving interest at three per cent. The issues were popular at once. About 5,500,000 Savings Certificates and £5,000,000 worth of Defence Bonds were sold in the first week of the Government's "Lend to Defend" campaign.

By now the first German bombs had fallen on Britain —on the Shetland Islands on November 13—but without doing any serious damage. A few days later a Nazi bomber was shot down over the Thames estuary. Then at last came news of the first decoration for heroism on the apparently motionless Western Front. An R.A.F. sergeant-observer—J. Vickers, of Birmingham—was awarded the French Military Medal for carrying on with his duties, and so enabling his pilot to land safely, though he had been badly wounded in air action with a German Messerschmitt. He died in hospital.

Yet though there was no large-scale war in the West, suddenly and surprisingly there was another war in the East. The Russians had little real confidence in their non-aggression treaty with Germany and decided to

strengthen their defences against possible German attacks. Leningrad and the naval base of Kronstadt seemed particularly vulnerable, since they were only about 20 miles from the Finnish border, and Stalin feared that Hitler might overrun Finland and so gain an easy route into Russia. He therefore ordered Finland to hand over a large strip of her territory, a Baltic port and a number of islands, so that Leningrad might have adequate protection.

Finland yielded to some of Russia's demands but would not grant them all. At the end of November Finland mobilised to defend herself, with the 70-year-old Marshal Mannerheim in command of her forces. A day later Russia invaded Finnish territory and bombed Helsinki and other towns. British sympathy was at once aroused by this wanton Soviet attack on a small neighbour.

CHAPTER III

"PHONEY" WINTER

ONE of the usual conversational openings in that first winter of the Second World War was: "Did you hear what Lord Haw-Haw said last night?" "Lord Haw-Haw" was the name that a British journalist had given to a regular speaker on the German radio who broadcast news commentaries in English for the benefit of people in Britain. The nickname suited his pompous voice, which linguistic experts soon declared to be unmistakably that of a Briton.

It was, in fact, the voice of William Joyce, a man of Anglo-Irish parentage who had been born in New York but had spent most of his life in Britain, where he was engaged in Fascist activities before leaving for Germany in August, 1939. After the war he paid with his life for his propaganda broadcasts on behalf of Germany. He was charged at the Old Bailey with high treason, was condemned to death and was hanged at Wandsworth Gaol on January 3, 1946.

At the beginning of the war "Lord Haw-Haw" had an enthusiastic public in Britain. But it was a public which laughed at his propaganda instead of being taken in by it. One of his favourite catch-phrases in those early days was: "Where is the *Ark Royal*?" The *Ark Royal* was Britain's greatest aircraft-carrier, and the Germans repeatedly claimed to have sunk her. It was galling for the British Admiralty to be unable to answer "Lord Haw-Haw's" sneers by explaining where the *Ark Royal*

really was. But such information would have been useful to the Germans, and Britain rightly refused to give it.

Though the *Ark Royal* herself was not in action at that time, other British ships had their moments of glory or tragedy. The war was "phoney" on the Western Front, but it was not "phoney" at sea. For Germany had more than her U-boat fleet to prey upon British shipping. She also had battleships at sea as commerce-raiders, notably the fast battle-cruisers, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, and the "pocket battleship", *Graf Spee*.

Late in November Britain was thrilled by the heroism of Captain Kennedy, commander of the British armed merchant cruiser, *Rawalpindi*. On November 23, while on patrol between Iceland and the Faroes, he sighted a German warship, which was, in fact, the *Scharnhorst*. Though Kennedy's ship was only a converted passenger-liner, and he knew that his armaments were vastly inferior to those which his enemy carried, he joined battle and fought on gallantly until the *Rawalpindi* was set ablaze by the *Scharnhorst's* heavy gunfire. She went down with her flag flying, and 260 of her officers and crew were lost. Two British cruisers came to the rescue before the *Rawalpindi* sank, but the *Scharnhorst* escaped into the darkness.

So far Britain had had the worse of the war at sea. But December brought welcome news of a British naval victory. This was the Battle of the River Plate.

Early on December 14 the Admiralty announced that the German pocket-battleship, *Admiral Scheer*, had been engaged by three British cruisers, *Ajax, Exeter* and *Achilles*. The enemy's name was given wrongly. It was not the *Admiral Scheer*, but her sister-ship, the *Graf Spee*, which had been attacking British commerce in the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean and was intercepted on her way to the River Plate by Commodore

Henry Harwood and three of the four cruisers under his command.

The German pocket-battleships were formidable vessels. Though only 10,000 tons, they had six 11-inch guns and a speed of 26 knots. One of Harwood's cruisers—the *Exeter*—had 8-inch guns; the others had only 6-inch. His fourth vessel, the *Cumberland*, was refitting in the Falkland Islands while the *Graf Spee* was making her way to South America.

Harwood had guessed when and where the *Graf Spee* would appear, and his guess was exactly right. On December 13, as his three ships were together off the mouth of the River Plate, on the South American coast, the *Graf Spee* came into sight, and Harwood, in the *Ajax*, decided that his squadron should attack her from different directions.

Though the *Graf Spee*'s fire was so much heavier than the cruisers', Harwood's brilliant tactics proved successful. All three vessels engaged the enemy fiercely, and the *Ajax* and the *Achilles* kept up the battle after the *Exeter* had been forced to withdraw because of the heavy damage inflicted on her. They did not sink the *Graf Spee*, but they had the satisfaction of routing her and watching her flee for refuge into the port of Montevideo, in Uruguay.

It was a splendid victory—the first British naval victory of the war. It was also the end of the *Graf Spee*, for the Uruguayan authorities would not allow Captain Langsdorff, the German commander, to remain in harbour for more than three days. When the time-limit was up, the *Ajax*, the *Achilles* and the *Cumberland* were all waiting to renew the attack as soon as the *Graf Spee* put to sea.

Captain Langsdorff declined to face them. He scuttled his ship, and two days later he committed

suicide. In a farewell message he said: "I am happy to pay with my life for any possible reflection on the honour of the flag."

The sinking of the *Graf Spee* had a dramatic sequel. In her commerce-raiding career she had sunk nine merchant ships, and had put their crews on board a German auxiliary vessel, the *Altmark*. This vessel was still afloat, and for two months after the Battle of the River Plate she successfully evaded British warships which were searching for her.

In February, 1940, she at last left the South Atlantic to return to Germany, but she was spotted by British aircraft as she was steaming down the coast of Norway. A British destroyer flotilla, under the command of Captain Philip Vian, in the *Cossack*, was sent to intercept her.

The *Altmark* took refuge in Jösing Fjord, and her captain told the commander of a Norwegian gun-boat that he had no prisoners on board. Vian knew better. He had been personally ordered by Churchill to board the *Altmark*, liberate the prisoners and take possession of the ship while waiting for further instructions. These orders meant that he would have to enter Norwegian territorial waters, but he did not hesitate. He explained the situation to the Norwegian gun-boat commander, took the *Cossack* into the fjord and boarded the *Altmark*.

After some hand-to-hand fighting the British boarders began to search the ship for prisoners. They were found below decks, 299 in all, and their first intimation of release was the cheerful hail: "The Navy's here!" Vian took them on board the *Cossack* and brought them home to Britain. Then the story of the *Graf Spee* was really completed.

Another British vessel which won fame in the first

winter of war was the submarine *Ursula*, which slipped through the Heligoland minefield, crept to the mouth of the Elbe and there sank a German cruiser.

At the end of 1939 it was still a "phoney war" on the Western Front. A considerable British Army was now in France. In December King George VI visited the troops there. But it was not until nearly three months after their first landing that they were engaged in any fighting with the Germans. The R.A.F. was more active, but the losses in what was then described as "the biggest air battle of the war" were only twelve German planes and seven British missing—modest figures in comparison with those of the great air engagements of later years.

That year the King set Britain a puzzle in his Christmas Day broadcast. He ended with a quotation which he gave as "a message of encouragement". These were the words he quoted: "And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the darkness'. And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be better to you than a light and safer than a known way'."

What was the King quoting? People looked up books of quotations and could not find it. Literary experts searched their libraries without success. In a day or two the puzzle was solved. The King's quotation came from a book of verses called *The Desert*, written 30 years earlier by Miss M. L. Haskins, a member of the staff of the London School of Economics. The book had been printed solely for private distribution among her friends and had never been published for ordinary sale.

It was the quietness of our own war that winter which made the Russo-Finnish war stand out in bolder relief. Britain was whole-heartedly on Finland's side,

and British business men were reported to have bought aeroplanes to send to the Finnish Air Force.

The Finns were doing well. For many weeks they held the Russians at bay, and their gallantry was greatly admired in Britain. Some sections of the Press called on the Government to send troops to help Finland.

In spite of the many new rules and regulations Britain had little experience of war-time hardships by the end of 1939. Rationing of bacon, butter and sugar was due to start on New Year's Day, to be followed by meat rationing in March. Torch batteries were very scarce, and growing alarm was aroused by the increase in road deaths due to the black-out. The total of 3,000 people killed on the roads in the first three months of the war was almost double the peace-time figure. In contrast, the British Army's casualty list up to December 31 contained only 758 names, and most of these casualties were the results of accidents or disease. Only 39 (including 24 wounded) were the result of enemy action.

The turn of the year brought no change on the Western Front. Indeed, the first two months of 1940 were quite uneventful. On the other side of the Atlantic Roosevelt was teaching the American public to understand the United States' international responsibilities. In one of his speeches at this time he told his countrymen that they could not remain indifferent to the suppression of liberties throughout the world, and that however much the United States might wish to isolate herself from the rest of the world she could not do so.

March came in, and still Finland was holding out against Russia. The Press and public campaign for helping the Finns grew stronger. President Roosevelt's cousin, Major Kermit Roosevelt, who had recently joined the British Army, announced that he would

resign his commission to take command of a British volunteer regiment in Finland.

But the Finns, who had fought so well for so many weeks, could not hold out much longer against their mightier neighbour. On March 12 it was announced that Finland and Russia had reached terms for a settlement, and British and French plans for helping the Finns were hastily cancelled. The Soviet terms imposed on Finland were so stringent that Roosevelt openly denounced them a few days later. It is a minor irony of history that Finland, whom so many British people were anxious to help in 1940, entered the war *on Germany's side* when Hitler invaded Russia in 1941.

This month of March, 1940, was notable for two events as well as the end of the Russo-Finnish war. One was the signing of a pact between the British Government and the French Government (now headed by Paul Reynaud, as Daladier's Cabinet had fallen). The agreement provided that "during the present war Britain and France will neither negotiate nor conclude an armistice or treaty of peace except by mutual agreement". These words were soon to have unexpected significance.

The second interesting event in these last days of the "phoney war" was of a very different kind. On March 20 a new chemical substance, which had been developed in the United States, was shown in England for the first time at Imperial Chemical House, London. It was called nylon, and it was briefly described as "a substance made by a complicated scientific process from air, water and by-products of coal." As Britain stood poised on the brink of almost illimitable war, her newspapers published their first photographs of nylon stockings.

CHAPTER IV

FROM NARVIK TO DUNKIRK

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, who was still Prime Minister of Britain, made an unfortunate speech on April 5, 1940. He spoke of Hitler's failure "to make an endeavour to overwhelm us and France before we had time to make good our deficiencies", and he added that one thing was certain: Hitler had "missed the bus".

Once again Chamberlain was wrong. At the very moment when he was speaking German ships were preparing to leave harbour for the invasion of Norway and German troops were massing to attack Holland, Belgium and France.

The Battle of Norway began with a strange coincidence. For a long time Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, had been anxious about German imports of Swedish iron ore, which was of great value for arms production. Most of this ore was sent by rail to the port of Narvik, on the west coast of Norway, and thence shipped to Germany. Since the German ships kept close to the shore in Norwegian territorial waters, they could not be attacked, though they were violating Norwegian neutrality by carrying cargoes of war materials.

In the Spring of 1940 Britain and France decided to block this Swedish ore traffic by laying mines near the Norwegian coast. This would force the German ships out into open waters where the British Navy could intercept them and seize their contraband goods. The mine-laying began on April 8, but it was already too

late. Two days earlier German ships had put to sea to begin an assault on Norway.

The invasion of Norway was not included in Hitler's original war plans, but various factors made him change his mind. His naval chiefs pleaded to be allowed to seize the Norwegian port of Trondheim for use as a northern base. It seemed possible that Britain and France might send troops across Norway to help Finland, and Hitler feared that if once the Western Allies entered Norway they would not be disposed to leave it again. (Britain and France were, in fact, making plans to help Finland when the sudden ending of the Russo-Finnish war made their help unnecessary.)

Thirdly, Norway provided Hitler with a ready-made traitor—one Vidkun Quisling, a Norwegian Nazi who offered to seize power in his country and then hand the ports and air bases over to Germany. His treachery put his name into the dictionaries. For years afterwards anyone who betrayed his country was called a "quisling".

Yet another reason for Hitler's change of mind was the *Altmark* incident, which he regarded as a prelude to Allied operations in Norway. He therefore decided to invade both Denmark and Norway, so that all western Scandinavia would be under his control. April 6 was the day fixed for the German fleet's embarkation.

So on one April morning Britain heard that her own Navy had laid mines in Norwegian waters, and on the next heard that Germany had overrun Denmark (who had virtually no means of defence and was obliged to give in with only a faint show of resistance) and seized many strategic points in Norway. One day more brought news that Quisling had made himself Premier of a "National" Government after the German occupation of Oslo, the Norwegian capital.

Peace-loving Norway was quite unready to face an invasion. She was helpless when German transports sailed suddenly into her ports and German airborne troops seized her airfields. Oslo itself was taken by a small German force after only brief fighting, largely because the population was bewildered by the unexpected happenings. The ore port of Narvik, 600 miles away from Oslo, was swiftly occupied by 2,000 German troops, some of whom carried placards saying in Norwegian: "Be calm. Take things easily. We come to help you against the English."

Yet the small Norwegian Army was not to be easily beaten, even though its General Staff declared on the day after the invasion that resistance was hopeless. The Chief of the General Staff and the Commander of the Field Army resigned, but a Colonel Ruge was appointed Commanding General and began his gallant attempt to save Norway.

Britain and France at once decided to help Norway both at sea and on land. The opening British action in the campaign was the Battle of Narvik.

When the first news of the German invasion reached the Admiralty, the Second Destroyer Flotilla, under the command of Captain B. A. W. Warburton-Lee, was ordered to enter Narvik fjord to prevent a German landing. It was not then known that ten German destroyers, each of 1,800 tons, had already entered Narvik and its neighbouring fjords.

Warburton-Lee had only five destroyers—*Hardy, Havoc, Hunter, Hostile* and *Hotspur*—and they were all of less tonnage than the German ships. Yet when he reached Narvik and found the Germans there he at once decided to give battle.

His courage was rewarded. In a fierce battle the British flotilla sank two German destroyers and six

enemy supply ships, and seriously damaged five other destroyers. On our side the *Hunter* was sunk, the *Hotspur* was badly damaged, and Warburton-Lee's own ship, the *Hardy*, was hit again and again and at last was run aground by her only unwounded officer. About 170 of her crew got ashore, but Warburton-Lee was mortally wounded by a shell which hit the bridge. His last signal was: "Continue to engage the enemy."

Two months after his death Warburton-Lee was awarded the Victoria Cross—the first V.C. of the war. His successful attack had so badly crippled the German destroyer force that it had no chance when the British cruiser *Warspite* and nine destroyers sailed into Narvik fjord three days later. All the remaining German ships were then sunk.

On land the small Norwegian Army fought the Germans single-handed for the first week of the Battle of Norway. It was soon to be reinforced, though not very effectively. Britain and France made hasty plans to help Norway, but these plans were so frequently changed and so inadequately carried out that there was never much real hope of driving the Germans out of the country.

Three landings were made on the Norwegian coast—at Andalsnes, at Namsos and at Narvik. British troops had a foothold in Norway for nearly two months—from April 16 until June 8. Yet all the attempts to link up the different landing forces collapsed. The campaign ended in evacuation and failure.

Certainly our men were fighting in most harassing weather conditions. At one stage of the Namsos operations the snow was so thick that a company of British troops could march only 1½ miles in 4½ hours. In all the circumstances the landing-parties did as well as could have been expected, but they were fighting an enemy

who had command of the air and had superior equipment on land.

Rumours of probable evacuation were heard in Britain less than a fortnight after the first landing. The Andalsnes party was evacuated on April 30, and the Namsos party on May 8, but the Narvik forces remained in Norway till June. They even had the satisfaction of capturing Narvik itself on May 28, with the co-operation of a British naval force of three cruisers and five destroyers which bombarded the port and surrounding positions held by the Germans. When leaving Narvik in the face of this attack the Germans so thoroughly sabotaged the port and the iron ore plant that for the rest of the war they never supplied Germany with her pre-war quantities of Swedish ore. The highest amount shipped through Narvik to Germany during the war was only 27 per cent. of what had been carried before.

Norway had her own heroes in these dark weeks. One was General Ruge, who was called to the highest command at the moment of gravest crisis and quickly revealed himself as a brave and resourceful leader. Another hero was King Haakon of Norway, who was then 67 years old. His gallant refusal to surrender inspired his countrymen and won the admiration of the world. The Germans made many attempts to capture him but he stayed in his country until the last British evacuation, when he and his Ministers came to Britain in the cruiser *Devonshire*.

There were also the three bus-drivers of Oslo. When fighting was going on not far from the capital, the Germans ordered Oslo bus-drivers to take German troops to the front at Hünefoss, north-west of the city. All the drivers were angry at having to take Germans to fight their own countrymen.

There is a steep precipice at one part of the road from Oslo to Hünefoss. One day four buses set off from Oslo for the battle-front, each with a load of 60 German soldiers. As the first bus approached the precipice the driver accelerated and drove his bus straight over the edge. The two following buses did the same, but the soldiers on the fourth were able to grasp the wheel from the driver before he could hurl them over the precipice. At the cost of their own lives those three bus-drivers had killed 180 German soldiers.

All Britain was shocked by the failure of British troops in Norway and by the loss of the aircraft-carrier *Glorious* in an engagement with the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau* during the final evacuation. Home affairs suddenly lost their importance, and the introduction of purchase tax on April 23 and the raising of letter postage rates from 2*d.* to 2½*d.* passed almost without criticism. The sharp blow which British prestige had suffered in Norway had brought Britain face to face with the stern realities of Hitler's war.

Chamberlain was blamed for the mishandling of the Norwegian campaign. He defended the Government's actions when the House of Commons debated the campaign, but Sir Roger Keyes, a brilliant naval commander of the First World War, described the British failure to take Trondheim as "a shocking story of ineptitude that ought never to have been allowed to happen." To make sure of catching the Speaker's eye in this important debate, Keyes (on his wife's suggestion) went to the House of Commons in admiral's uniform with dazzling rows of decorations.

In this same debate Leo Amery, a veteran member of the Conservative Party, of which Chamberlain was then leader, made a deep impression on his fellow M.P.s by his vehement attack on the Government.

There were loud cheers when he looked at the Government Front Bench and quoted the words which Cromwell had used to the Long Parliament: "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!"

It was the end for Chamberlain. On May 8, when the House of Commons voted on the Norwegian debate, the Government's majority was only 81—a big fall from its usual figure. Chamberlain thought of reconstituting his Government, but was soon convinced that he himself must resign. A Coalition Government of all parties was needed to prosecute the war, and the Labour Party would not serve under Chamberlain.

Only two men were possible successors—Lord Halifax, Foreign Secretary, and Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty. But Halifax, who was Chamberlain's own choice, thought it would be impracticable for a member of the House of Lords to be Prime Minister in war-time.

Churchill's hour had come. On the evening of May 10 Chamberlain saw King George VI and submitted his resignation. A short time later the King sent for Churchill and asked him to form a Government. Churchill quickly invited Clement Attlee and Arthur Greenwood, the Labour Party leaders, to join the War Cabinet and to suggest the names of other Labour men who would be suitable for Ministerial office. Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Liberal leader, also promised his party's support. The war-time Coalition Government, which was to hold office until 1945, was now in being.

Churchill was then 65. He was the elder statesman whom everyone knew, the man whose name had been familiar to millions of British people all their lives. In 1940 his stalwart figure and square jaw seemed to make

him the embodiment of John Bull. But as the grandson of the seventh Duke of Marlborough, the son of a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Randolph Churchill, and still more as Winston Churchill himself he had been a public figure in Britain since 1900.

He was educated at Harrow and joined the Regular Army as an officer in the 4th Hussars, but resigned his commission in order to enter politics. His work as a war correspondent in the South African War and his escape from imprisonment by the Boers made him well known at the very beginning of the twentieth century. In 1900, at the age of 26, he became M.P. for Oldham, and thus began the dazzling political career in which, either as Liberal or as Conservative, he was to hold at one time or another almost every major political office.

When the First World War broke out Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty, but he was moved from this post after the failure of the unfortunate Gallipoli campaign. He held further office in Coalition and Conservative Governments during the nineteen-twenties, but his disagreement with his Conservative colleagues over their plans for Indian self-government finally took him out of the Cabinet. As a Parliamentary backbencher he had time for important literary work, which itself was enough to have given him a great reputation, found diversion in oil-painting and brick-laying, and continually warned the Government about the growing air and military threats of Germany.

Because of these warnings Churchill, above all other leading statesmen, was wholly free from responsibility for Britain's weakness when war came. Yet in spite of his varied and remarkable career many British people thought he was too unreliable to be a good Prime Minister. These sceptics were proved wrong in the five years from 1940 to 1945. Churchill did not "win the

war", but it is doubtful if Britain could have won it without the inspiring leadership he gave to the whole country. He set an example of dogged perseverance and absolute refusal to be beaten, and his characteristic broadcasts, into which flashes of Churchillian humour so often intruded, will never be forgotten by those who heard them.

Nazi tanks and planes were already busy in Western Europe when Churchill took office as Prime Minister. Hitler was catching the bus which Chamberlain said he had missed. On that very morning of May 10 German forces invaded Holland and Belgium by air and by land. The long-expected attack on the West had begun.

France was Hitler's objective after the incidental conquest of Holland and Belgium. His strategy was the swing-round on the right flank which had been the classic German plan for invading France since Schlieffen invented it before the First World War.

Holland bore the brunt of the first attack. Strong parachute forces were dropped behind the Dutch Army's lines; an armoured division advanced on Rotterdam; bombers attacked cities and harbours and laid waste a huge area of Rotterdam itself. It was the Polish *Blitzkrieg* all over again.

The Dutch fought bravely, but were overwhelmed. Within three days Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands wisely left the country with her family and her Government, and took refuge in England. Two days later the Dutch Army ceased fighting on the orders of its Commander-in-Chief. Another free country had been added to Hitler's spoils.

British and French armies hurried to defend the Low Countries, but they were too late to stop the German advance into Belgium. By an unlucky chance the Belgian officer who should have destroyed an important

1. (*Top*) The Munich Conference, 1938—Mussolini, Hitler, Daladier and Chamberlain.

(*Bottom*) The Yalta Conference, 1945—Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin.

2. (*Top*) British and French troops awaiting evacuation from the Dunkirk beaches.

(*Bottom*) Troops returning from the Dieppe raid, August 1942.

bridge over the Albert Canal was himself blown up by a bomb from the air. Hitler's *Panzers* (armoured forces) swept on through Belgium, while his *Stukas* (dive-bombers) swooped down to drop their bombs on the defending armies.

Britain waited expectantly for retaliatory action by the British Expeditionary Force, under the command of General Lord Gort. But neither the British nor the French armies had the armoured strength to oppose a *Blitzkrieg*. In this critical week Churchill made one of his most famous war-time speeches, saying he had nothing to offer the country but "blood and toil and tears and sweat"; and on May 14 Anthony Eden, then Secretary of State for War, appealed for volunteers to defend Britain against Nazi parachutists.

The response was enthusiastic. Within an hour of his broadcast thousands of men all over the country hurried to police stations to enrol in the new organisation, and within two days 250,000 applications for enrolment had been received. These home defenders were first known as Local Defence Volunteers. Their name was changed later to Home Guard.

The Nazi onslaught also made a deep impression in the United States. Roosevelt declared that the U.S. must prepare to defend herself against any lightning offensive. He asked Congress not to take any action which would delay the delivery of American planes to foreign nations. The nations he had in mind were Britain and France.

Belgium was now paying dearly for her refusal before the war to co-ordinate military defence plans with Britain, France and Holland. She was powerless against the Nazi tanks and dive-bombers. On May 17 General Gamelin, French Commander-in-Chief, gave his armies the order: "Conquer or die." But on that day the Ger-

mans claimed the occupation of Brussels and Malines, and also of Sedan, on the French side of the Franco-Belgian frontier.

The war moved through Belgium to France, though the Belgian Army, under the command of King Leopold, was still holding a line in the Ghent area, with the British Expeditionary Force on its right. By May 21 and 22 newspaper headlines were telling of fierce battles round St. Quentin, of German tanks at Amiens, and of Arras and Cambrai laid waste by the invading forces. In blank despair Reynaud, the French Premier, dismissed Gamelin and called back the veteran General Weygand, who had been Marshal Foch's Chief of Staff in the First World War, to take command of the French armies.

The B.E.F. had been forced to withdraw from the advanced positions it had taken up early in the campaign. British, French and Belgians were all being driven back by the sheer pace and force of the Nazi Panzer attack. They had retreated from the Meuse to the Somme, but though Germany claimed that her troops were approaching the gates of Calais a small Anglo-French garrison stubbornly held Calais itself and so temporarily blocked the German encircling movement.

It was Brigadier Claude Nicholson who had the honour of saying "No" when the Germans called on Calais to surrender. His resolute defence played a vital part in helping the British Army to escape from the German trap.

The British position became desperate on the night of May 27, when the King of the Belgians decided to surrender. There has been much argument about King Leopold's action and about the measures he took (or did not take) to warn his Allies about his withdrawal

from the fighting. As Commander-in-Chief he was no doubt justified in taking any action he thought necessary to save his army from total destruction, though his own Prime Minister, Pierlot, at once denounced the King's decision. But whether Leopold was right or wrong, the Belgian surrender created an alarming gap in the Allied line and placed the British Army in a dangerously exposed position. It would have been entirely cut off if the Germans had reached the sea at Dunkirk. Gort had little time left in which to save the B.E.F.

These were grim and agonising days for Britain. The French armies had fallen back and back, and there was clearly no hope of their standing fast or covering the exposed British position. The B.E.F. was in as tight a corner as any British army had ever been. Evacuation was the only hope, but it seemed a faint hope at best.

The German trap was closing. Yet there was heartening news that the B.E.F. was fighting a stiff rearguard action and that Dunkirk was still held as a fortified camp. At last, as the shattering month of May came to an end, Britain heard that thousands of B.E.F. men had been saved from the trap and were already arriving at South Coast ports.

This was the "miracle of Dunkirk". It was a military miracle, for it was a great achievement to bring so many thousands of exhausted men out of the battle-line along congested roads to a single port, in the face of incessant Nazi bombing, and to organise them on the crowded beaches until the time for their evacuation arrived. It was an air miracle, for the R.A.F. fighters did magnificent work in attacking and destroying the Nazi bombers, thought their gallant fight was far inland and was not seen by the men waiting on the beaches. Above all, it was a miracle of the sea, for, as

the B.E.F. reached Dunkirk, a vast fleet of naval, mercantile and civilian ships and boats sailed from Britain to bring our soldiers home.

The Navy provided 39 destroyers and many smaller ships, and amateur yachtsmen and fishermen manned hundreds of "little boats" in the Dunkirk armada. French naval and merchant vessels swelled the total, which amounted to 861 craft of all kinds, excluding a number of ships' lifeboats and other boats of which no record was kept. Some of them took off the B.E.F. from piers and jetties. Others waited off shore, and soldiers waded out, up to their armpits in water, to board them.

By midnight on June 2 the operation was completed. Gort had then returned to England, and Major-General Harold Alexander was in command of the evacuation. When the last troops had been taken off, Alexander and the senior naval officer sailed up and down the shore in a motor-launch, calling out with a megaphone in case anyone had been left behind. When he was satisfied that all his men had been evacuated, Alexander himself returned to England.

Thanks to the "miracle of Dunkirk" four-fifths of the B.E.F. were brought safely home to England. But they had left enormous quantities of supplies and munitions behind them. Dunkirk was an occasion for national thanksgiving, but it was not a victory. Churchill warned the country that wars are not won by evacuations. Then, in rousing and inspiring words, he told the world that Britain would go on to the end. "We shall defend our island," he said, "whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender."

Churchill spoke for the country. That was how British people felt and thought after Dunkirk.

CHAPTER V

THE FALL OF FRANCE

The map of Europe was being rapidly redrawn. Already Hitler had added Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg to his previous spoils of Austria and Czechoslovakia and his share of Poland. For years he had boasted that he was going to establish a New Order in Europe, in which the former bourgeois democracies would become slave-nations controlled by the German master-race. Now his boasts were being translated into grim reality. The brutality and oppression of Nazi rule in Germany itself could now be transferred on an even grander scale to the occupied countries. Freedom was dying in Middle and Western Europe.

Eastern Europe was changing, too. Stalin was not content with his Polish gains and his seizure of part of Finland. The German-Soviet pact of August, 1939, had recognised Russia's special interests in Eastern Europe. Stalin made early use of this agreement.

In June he sent Red Army troops into Lithuania, Latvia and Esthonia and forced these three Baltic States to set up pro-Soviet Governments. All three were formally annexed by Russia two months later. They are still part of the Soviet Union, which, alone of the world's Great Powers, came out of the war with increased territory.

Even these Baltic gains were not enough for Stalin. He rightly guessed that Hitler would soon put pressure

on Rumania and he decided to seize part of that country before Hitler had time to act. In June King Carol of Rumania received an ultimatum from Russia, ordering him to surrender Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Carol was not equal to fighting the Russians. He obediently accepted the ultimatum and handed over part of his country to Stalin.

Hitler now prepared to win his greatest prize. After the evacuation of Dunkirk his armies threw their whole weight against France.

The French were not entirely alone. Britain had not evacuated all her troops from the Continent. The 51st Highland Division and the bulk of the only British Armoured Division were still in France behind the Somme. Early in June the 52nd Lowland Division and the leading Division of the Canadian Army, which had just arrived in Britain, were sent to join them.

R.A.F. fighter squadrons were also in the Battle of France, but Churchill would not yield to French demands that Britain should send all her fighter aircraft across the Channel. No matter what happened in France, he insisted that 25 fighter squadrons must stay in Britain.

This was a hard decision, in view of France's deadly peril, but it was the only right one. It was certain that Britain would be heavily attacked by German bombers if France were defeated, and she dared not strip herself completely of fighter defences. The Battle of Britain would have had a different ending if most of our Hurricanes and Spitfires had been thrown away weeks earlier in a vain attempt to save France.

In these fateful days the tragedy of France was unfolded on two stages. One was the battle-front, the other was the meeting-place of the French Cabinet.

When a new German advance opened the last phase

of the Battle of France on June 5, it could still be hoped that the offensive might be checked. People remembered how the big offensives in the First World War had eventually lost momentum and come to a standstill. The French were still holding a line along the Aisne and up to the mouth of the Somme. The very names of those rivers recalled stout resistance in the earlier war.

This was a different war. Against Germany's 124 divisions France (with British reinforcements) had only 65. Though she was not so weak in armour as has often been supposed, her tanks were scattered through her armies instead of being concentrated in one powerful striking force. She thus had no effective defence against Hitler's imposing array of tanks and dive-bombers.

It was only a matter of time. Odd scraps of news from the front raised unjustified hopes in Britain. One day it was claimed that a new French defence system had trapped the German armies in their offensive towards Paris. Then it was stated that France was fighting "foot by foot" and was making counter-attacks in some places. Such hopes were quickly dashed. The German advance swept on. On June 9 Rouen was captured and Paris was threatened by a line of battle stretching from Vernon (on the Seine) to Compiègne.

At this moment no one could have saved France from disaster, but a great man could have saved her from dishonour. There was no such man in the French High Command or in the higher Cabinet posts, though there was, in fact, a "man of destiny" holding a junior Ministerial office.

Among the generals and politicians who were most active, for good or ill, while France was falling, four will always be remembered, but for widely different reasons—Reynaud, Pétain, Weygand and de Gaulle.

Paul Reynaud, who had succeeded Daladier as Prime Minister in March, was chiefly known as an economic and financial expert. His big chance to guide his country came to him too late, but he showed his integrity by holding out against capitulation to Germany as long as he could carry his Cabinet with him. He had sown the seeds of his own failure by taking Marshal Pétain into his Cabinet at the end of May.

Pétain, bluff, solemn, white-moustached and carrying the great prestige of having been French Commander-in-Chief in the First World War, was 84 years old when Reynaud called him back from Spain, where he had been French Ambassador since the previous year. His return was in the French tradition of turning to old and faithful servants in times of crisis. In the First World War Clemenceau became Premier at the age of 76, and lived up to his nickname of " Tiger " by rallying France behind him.

Pétain was no " tiger ". He had been defeatist even in the earlier war, and he now felt that France's position was hopeless. Those Frenchmen who wanted an armistice—and there were many among the wealthier classes—looked on Pétain as their champion. Reynaud knew this, but told de Gaulle: " It's better to have him inside than out." Events were to prove him wrong.

General Weygand was another old servant called back to the highest duty. At 72 he still looked dapper and lively, but when he succeeded Gamelin as Commander-in-Chief it was already too late to hold the Germans back. Nothing could be done without big strategic reserves, and the French Army had no reserves at all. Moreover, though Weygand had made a big reputation as Chief of Staff to Marshal Foch in the First World War he had never commanded armies in the field. He, too, was defeatist, and even expressed the

extraordinary view that France deserved to be beaten to atone for her moral and spiritual failings.

Junior to all three was the newly-promoted General Charles de Gaulle, who had commanded an armoured division in the first stage of the Battle of France and had been appointed Under-Secretary of State for National Defence on June 6.

De Gaulle was then 49. He was very tall, and his high forehead and neatly-parted black hair helped to give him a curiously impressive appearance. In the years between the wars he had ceaselessly urged that France should have a fully mechanised army, but had been always overruled by his superiors. Though he could do nothing to save France at this late hour, he was widely recognised as a soldier of great power and determination. Churchill himself, on one of his visits to France at this time, greeted de Gaulle as "the man of destiny".

The first ten days of June were enough to show that France was beaten. In face of the threat to Paris, the French Government decided on June 9 to leave the capital for Tours. Britain had hoped that France would fight a long delaying action in and around Paris, but on June 10 Weygand declared it "an open city" and ordered that no attempt should be made to defend it.

Three days later the Germans entered Paris. An observer noted the irony of the long German columns marching past an immense French War Bond propaganda poster, which declared: "*Nous vainquerons parceque nous sommes les plus forts.*"

While the French Government hurried west from Paris another enemy entered the war against Britain and France. Mussolini, the Italian dictator, decided that it was time for him to fulfil his obligations as a member of the Rome-Berlin Axis. He realised that Germany had nearly completed the conquest of France,

and he was afraid that he would get no share of the spoils unless he took action quickly. He declared war on June 10.

Italians had their share of fighting later in the war, usually without much success, but their attempt to join in the Battle of France was wholly inglorious. Their bid to invade France over the Alpine passes and along the Riviera coast was blocked at every point. Though the French were outnumbered in this area by 30 Italian divisions to their own three, Italy made no contribution to the defeat of France. Fighting on this front ceased after the Franco-German armistice, but Mussolini was disappointed in his hope of securing rich spoils. All that Hitler gave him was the French Riviera town of Mentone.

The French Cabinet was not alone in its journey westward, for the roads of France were clogged with hordes of civilian refugees from the battle areas. In cars, on bicycles and on foot they were hurrying to what they thought was safety, taking with them as many of their family goods as they could salvage or carry. The numbers of refugees were soon increased by the Government's order that all able-bodied Frenchmen should leave Paris, and troop movements became almost impossible along roads cluttered with fleeing civilians.

Tours was the French Government's first stopping-place. The Army headquarters were then at Briare, near Orleans. It was at Briare that Churchill, paying his fourth war-time visit to France, met the French statesmen and generals and heard Weygand explain that the military situation was hopeless.

That was on June 11. On that day Reynaud still maintained that France would not give in. Two days later, when Churchill again flew to France, Reynaud

asked him what Britain's attitude would be if France felt obliged to make a separate peace with Germany, in spite of the solemn pledge she had made three months earlier that she would not do so. Churchill replied that "in no case would Britain waste time in reproaches and recrimination", and that, whatever happened, Britain herself would fight on.

At this meeting Churchill approved of Reynaud's resolve to ask Roosevelt to bring the United States into the war, and he also asked for guarantees about the future of the French Fleet if France collapsed. That night Reynaud broadcast to the French people: "If a miracle is needed to save France, I believe in miracles."

There was no miracle. The United States had no intention of entering the war at that time, and Roosevelt could not agree to Reynaud's request. The Germans marched on, and the French Cabinet decided to withdraw still further, this time to Bordeaux, on the Atlantic coast, while the military situation grew daily more desperate. Even the great illusion of the Maginot Line was dispelled in this final stage of the Battle of France. The Germans had by-passed it when they invaded Belgium. Now they penetrated the Line itself in two places.

At Bordeaux the only question before the French Cabinet was whether to capitulate entirely or to move to North Africa and carry on the war in France's name from her Colonies. Defeat in France itself was now considered to be inevitable.

Though not a full member of the Cabinet, de Gaulle was a warm supporter of the African plan. Reynaud, too, thought it might be possible to transfer the French Government to Algiers. He told de Gaulle to go to London to arrange with Britain for help in transporting as many men as possible to North Africa.

It was during de Gaulle's visit to London that Britain made a remarkable offer to join France for ever by the establishment of a Franco-British Union. Both the British Government and French representatives then in London knew that the mood of surrender was growing at Bordeaux. They all felt that something drastic should be done to strengthen Reynaud in standing out for the escape to Africa and the continuance of the war.

On June 16 de Gaulle telephoned to Reynaud at Bordeaux the text of a momentous document headed "Declaration of Union". It provided that "Britain and France shall no longer be two nations, but one Franco-British Union"; that "the constitution of the Union will provide for joint organs of defence, foreign and economic policies"; and that every citizen of France will enjoy immediately the citizenship of Great Britain; every British subject will become a citizen of France." It also said that there should be a single Franco-British War Cabinet, that the two Parliaments should be formally associated, and that France should keep her available forces in the field, on the sea and in the air.

It was a fascinating though, in the long run, quite impracticable offer. If France had agreed and had fought on, British and French would to-day be citizens of one State; but though it would be pleasant for British people to travel all over France without passports, it is hard to believe that two such widely different countries could really have formed a single political unit. In any case the offer was in vain. Reynaud had lost the support of his Cabinet. When de Gaulle went back to Bordeaux that evening Reynaud had resigned and Pétain had become Prime Minister.

That was the end. Defeatism had carried the day at the crucial Cabinet meeting. Pétain had become Prime

Minister to surrender to Germany. The pact with Britain renouncing separate peace approaches was now to be broken.

June 17, 1940, was France's date with destiny. On that day Pétain asked Hitler for an armistice and ordered all French troops to stop fighting.

As soon as Churchill heard of this order, he told General Sir Alan Brooke, commander of the British forces still in France, to evacuate them all at once. Unhappily, Brooke could not bring home the 51st Division, which had been caught in a trap in the Rouen-Dieppe cul-de-sac some days earlier. Out of this Division and the French Ninth Corps, which was fighting with it, only about 2,300 officers and men escaped; the remaining 8,000 fell into German hands.

In general, the second evacuation—from Brest and other French ports—repeated the Dunkirk success. In spite of German air attacks on the transport vessels, 136,000 British troops and 310 guns were evacuated.

One grim tragedy illustrates the risks that were being run. At St. Nazaire the 20,000-ton liner, *Lancastria*, was bombed and set on fire just when she was leaving for Britain. Flaming oil covered the water round the ship, and more than 3,000 men lost their lives.

So France had fallen. A campaign lasting less than six weeks had crushed one of the world's Great Powers.

This was Hitler's biggest triumph. Even allowing for the French Army's failure to develop mechanised forces and to make the best use of those which it actually had, even allowing for the apathy induced in France by the months of "phoney war" and the false confidence created by the myth of the Maginot Line, Germany's conquest of France in 1940 remains one of the outstanding military successes of all time.

It was Hitler's personal triumph, too. Von Rundstedt,

von Kleist and Guderian were the chief German generals in the French campaign, but it was Hitler who had overruled the hesitations of his General Staff and had firmly maintained that France would collapse before a strong offensive. Hitler often spoke of his "intuitions": this time they had served him well. It was small wonder that German newsreel photographs showed him dancing a jig of delight as he heard of France's total capitulation.

The armistice was less exacting than France had feared. Germany did not attempt to take over the French Fleet. The French Colonies were to remain under their existing administrations. France itself was divided into two zones—one (amounting to about three-fifths of the country and including Paris) occupied by German troops, the other unoccupied. All the French Channel and Atlantic ports were in the occupied zone.

Pétain, who was still Prime Minister, set up his Government at Vichy, in the unoccupied part of France. His right-hand man in what came to be known as the Vichy Government was Pierre Laval, an astute but unscrupulous politician of particularly unattractive appearance. (He was small and dark-haired, with a sallow skin and irregular teeth, and usually wore a rather dirty white tie.) For the rest of the war the name "Vichy" was the symbol of French defeatists' collaboration with the Nazis.

While Hitler exulted, Britain was stunned by the collapse of France. Even though it had been expected, many British people unconsciously shared Reynaud's belief that "a miracle" would save her. Yet no one—apart from a handful of pro-Nazis—thought that because France had surrendered, Britain should surrender too.

Churchill expressed the nation's first reactions in a short broadcast on the evening of June 17.

"The news from France is very bad," he began, "and I grieve for the gallant French people who have fallen into this terrible misfortune." In unforgettable words he proclaimed: "We have become the sole champions now in arms to defend the world cause. We shall do our best to be worthy of this high honour. We shall defend our island home, and with the British Empire we shall fight on unconquerable until the curse of Hitler is lifted from the brows of mankind. We are sure that in the end all will come right."

There was no argument or hesitation. Britain was resolved to go on fighting and to face whatever perils of bombing or even invasion the next few months would surely bring. Churchill again spoke for the nation in the words he used in the House of Commons on June 18: "Let us brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say: 'This was their finest hour.'"

Though the future looked dark and uncertain, the days after the fall of France brought a slight upsurge of hope in one direction. Britain watched with warm approval as de Gaulle began to salvage all that he could from the wreck of his country's honour.

De Gaulle had made up his mind weeks earlier that he himself would fight on even if France fell. When he returned to Bordeaux from London on June 16 and found the French Government on the verge of surrender, he at once resolved that he would not stay in France. At nine o'clock on the following morning he boarded the same British aeroplane which had taken him to Bordeaux and flew back to London.

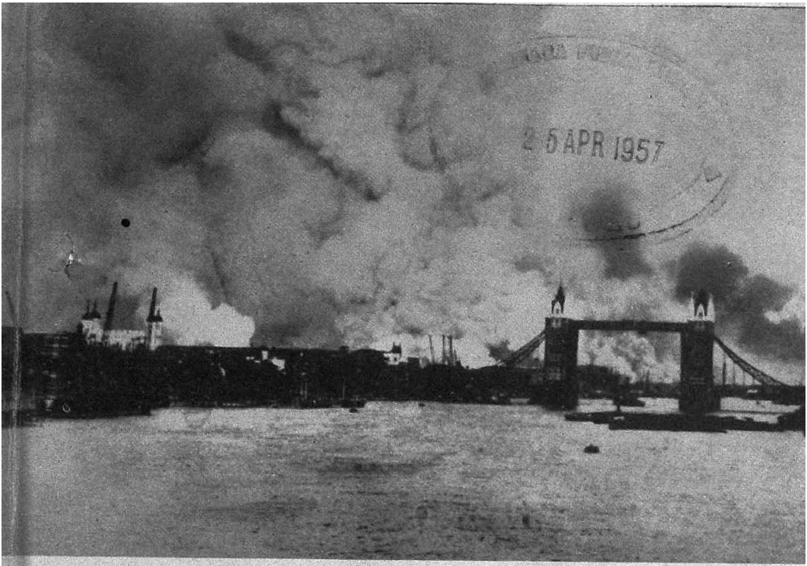
There, without resources apart from 100,000 francs

that Reynaud had given him out of the French Government's secret funds, he boldly raised the banner of continued French resistance—soon to be known as the Free French movement—in two spirited broadcasts to Frenchmen in Britain and France. In these he appealed to all French officers and men who were then on British soil, or might be in the future, to get in touch with him in London. He made a similar appeal to French engineers and skilled workmen from the armament factories. "I realise," he said, "that I now speak for France."

This was a bold claim, for de Gaulle was not at that time a great national figure in his own country. Yet it was well justified by his work in the months and years that followed, as he raised substantial fighting forces for Free France and rallied a great part of the French African Empire in support of French resistance.

Time was to prove de Gaulle a tough customer for Britain and the United States to deal with, one who would never yield an inch and told his followers that "our greatness and our strength consist solely in intransigence concerning the rights of France". These difficulties were still in the future in June, 1940. His heroic call to his countrymen gave British people a cheering subject for discussion as they waited tensely for Hitler's next move. They had not long to wait.

25 APR 1957



3. (*Top*) London docks after the first mass air-raid, 7th September 1940.

(*Bottom*) A scene in the Elephant and Castle tube station, London 1940.

6 APR 1951

4. (*Top*) Fighter pilots "scramble" for their Spitfires when enemy planes are reported.

(*Bottom*) A bomber crew leaving their aircraft after a raid on Frankfurt.

CHAPTER VI

"NEVER WAS SO MUCH . . ."

For a year after the fall of France Britain stood alone against Germany and Italy. It was a great year—that "finest hour" of which Churchill had spoken. Both the United States and Russia had a big share in the final victory of 1945. But no final victory would have been possible if Britain had not held out against fantastic odds in 1940 and 1941.

German air raids on Britain began on a small scale even before the Battle of France was over. On June 20 the Press reported what was so far the biggest air attack of the war. Nine people were killed and 60 injured by bombs which German raiders dropped in the north-east, north-west and south of England. On June 24 London had its first air-raid warning since the false alarm of the previous September. But there were no bombs, and the reassuring, long-drawn-out note of the "All clear" sounded after three hours. The Battle of Britain had not yet begun.

At this time civilians were given much advice about what to do if the Germans invaded Britain. The most important rule was to "stay put", since the experience of France had shown how gravely defence could be handicapped if civilian refugees clogged the roads. Motorists were ordered to immobilise parked cars and to lock the doors whenever a car was left unattended. All signposts on British roads were taken down, so as to confuse German parachutists. If an invasion began,

the signal would be the ringing of church bells, which were otherwise to remain silent during the war.

The subsidiary effects of the war were many and various. The Timber Controller ineffectively appealed to women to stop wearing high-heeled shoes so as to save shipping space. There was less newsprint for newspapers, which were reduced to six pages and were soon to have only four. Tea was rationed at two ounces a week and iced cakes were banned. Lord Beaverbrook, Minister of Aircraft Production, asked the women of Britain to give up every aluminium pot or pan they could spare, so that the metal could be used for making Hurricane and Spitfire fighter planes. The local headquarters of the W.V.S.—Women's Voluntary Services—was the collecting agency for aluminium articles in every district.

Throughout that summer British morale was high. Though Britain seemed to be at Hitler's mercy, people generally thought that we should "muddle through" again as we always had before. People who spread "alarm and despondency" were liable to fines and imprisonment. A woman schoolteacher was fined £20 and sent to gaol for two months for having called Army officers fools for fighting Hitler, and an old man received a prison sentence for having said that in two months the *Swastika* (the Nazi emblem) would be flying over the House of Commons.

At the end of June Britain decided to demilitarise the Channel Islands, apparently on the grounds that they were of no strategic value to either Britain or Germany; and about a quarter of the population of Jersey and Guernsey was evacuated to Britain. When the Germans first bombed and machine-gunned the islands, and then occupied them, most people in Britain felt disappointed that no attempt had been made to defend them. The

Channel Islanders suffered much hardship under the German occupation.

One of the War Cabinet's chief worries at this time was the danger of the French Fleet being seized by Hitler, even though the terms of the Franco-German armistice provided that he would not do so. To avert this risk, the British Navy presented an ultimatum to the admiral commanding a number of French battleships and cruisers at Oran, in North Africa: he was offered a choice between bringing his ships over to Britain or taking other steps to keep them out of German hands.

When he rejected the ultimatum, the Navy was obliged to open fire. One French battleship was blown up, and two other warships were driven aground. It was distressing for British sailors to fight their former allies, but Britain could not afford to take chances in such an important matter. Happily, the units of the French Fleet in port at Alexandria were immobilised without fighting.

The German air attack on Britain intensified during July. In one week it was claimed that 74 German raiders had been shot down, though many of our careful estimates of enemy losses were found to be inaccurate when the German Air Ministry records were examined after the war. In mid-July it was learnt that a Hurricane pilot who had destroyed a German Dornier was a young man who had lost both his legs in a flying crash six years earlier. His name was Douglas Bader.

This summer a war decoration was awarded for the first time to a member of the W.A.A.F.—the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. The girl who was honoured was 29-year-old Corporal Joan Pearson. She saved a British pilot from a burning plane by dragging him out and

throwing herself on top of him when a bomb on board the plane exploded.

Before unleashing the full strength of Goering's *Luftwaffe* (air force) on Britain, Hitler appealed, as he said, "once more and for the last time to reason". The alternatives he put before us were "Surrender or be annihilated". Churchill replied on Britain's behalf: "We shall seek no terms, we shall tolerate no parley. We may show mercy—we shall ask none."

August came, and brought with it still greater activity in the air. More German bombs were dropped on Britain. More raiders were shot down. Though British people did not realise it at first, the Battle of Britain had begun.

The official dates for the Battle of Britain are from August 8 to October 31, 1940. On the first of these dates the Luftwaffe sent big formations of bombers, dive-bombers and fighters to attack convoys in the English Channel. They sank two ships off the Isle of Wight, and dispersed a convoy off Bournemouth.

Three days later they bombed Portland and Weymouth, and attacked convoys in the Thames estuary and off Harwich. Then came the big assault of August 12, when 200 German aircraft swooped on Dover and 150 more bombed Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. Their targets were the five coastal radar stations, from which direction-finding radio waves gave the R.A.F. full warning of the approach of enemy aircraft. One station was destroyed, the others damaged, but by the next morning the Channel radar system was in working order again.

Now the Battle of Britain was fully joined. In these critical weeks Britain's fate depended on the achievements of two great fighter planes, the Spitfire and the Hurricane, which had been planned as far back as 1934.

and of fewer than 1,500 pilots of the Royal Air Force. Early in July the R.A.F. had had only 1,243 trained pilots in the Fighter Command, of which Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding was commanding officer. Training had been speeded up since then, but by August there were still only 55 fighter squadrons, manned by 1,434 pilots.

Compared with the vast numbers of men who fought and died in the Second World War, 1,434 is a fantastically small figure. But it was big enough to turn the scale. These young, eager and fearless pilots flew sortie after sortie against the German raiders, and finally destroyed Hitler's hope of following up a successful air attack with Operation Sealion—the German code-name for the invasion of Britain. Personal courage, superb organisation and leadership and the high technical efficiency of the radar system were the main factors of Britain's victory in this decisive battle of the first stage of the war.

In the middle of August that victory had still to be won. On August 13 the Luftwaffe turned its attention to Fighter Command airfields, in the hope of destroying its enemies on the ground; but it had little success in this new field of attack.

Two days later—on August 15—came another major onslaught, one of the biggest in the whole battle. This time the Germans hit five airfields and four aircraft factories, but they lost 76 aircraft in doing so, while the R.A.F. lost only 34. First reports in the British Press said that 144 Germans were brought down on that one day, but after the war this was found to be a miscalculation. None the less, 261 German aircraft were actually destroyed in the week ending August 17. Goering had never dreamed that his precious Luftwaffe would suffer such shattering losses.

It was during a brief lull in the battle, due to bad weather, that Churchill made an unforgettable speech in the House of Commons. "The gratitude of every home in our island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty," he said on August 20, "goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

A few days later Goering renewed his attacks on the South Coast ports and inland fighter airfields, trying to crush the R.A.F. by weight of numbers. At this time single British fighter squadrons had to encounter 20 to 40 German bombers, escorted by as many as 100 fighters. Yet in spite of the heavy odds against the R.A.F., every day the German losses were roughly double our own.

So far, the South Coast had had most of the bombs. Schools in that area were found other quarters for the approaching winter term. Roedean, for instance, moved from Brighton to Keswick, where the girls were housed in two hotels.

Further inland, some bombs had been dropped in the southern suburbs of London, but the city itself had not been a major target for raiders. It was not until September 7 that Goering, having failed to destroy Fighter Command, turned his attention to industrial and other centres, with London as the biggest target of all.

The Battle of London was waged from September 7 to October 5. On the first day—a Saturday—British fighters blocked the Luftwaffe's approach over Kent and East Surrey, but some of the bombers got through and scored direct hits on London dock buildings, fac-

tories, railways and gas and electricity plants. Fires raged in the dockside and Woolwich districts, and 400 civilians were killed in day and night raids.

Day after day, night after night, London was bombed by the Luftwaffe. Schools, hospitals and private houses suffered no less than docks, factories and public buildings. One day a bomber was brought down outside Victoria Station—the first to be destroyed in London itself during the war. St. Thomas's Hospital and the County Hall were among many buildings that were hit.

The biggest day was September 15. On that day Goering had ordered that every German bomber should have an escort of five fighters. He intended that this time the bombers should get through in force and inflict irreparable damage on London. Once again he underestimated the R.A.F.

As usual, radar had warned Fighter Command of the bombers' approach. They came over at 11.30 a.m., but were intercepted by British fighters soon after they had crossed the coastline. The decisive encounters took place over Kent and South London; some of the raiders got through, but the whole air armada was routed and dispersed in disorder. A second major attack was similarly intercepted and routed in the early afternoon.

Though the German losses—at first believed to be 175—were only 56, this was the turning-point of the battle. Goering had made his biggest throw and had failed again. Hitler realised that there was no immediate hope of shattering London and grounding the R.A.F. as a preliminary to invasion. Four days later he called off the arrangements for Operation Sealion.

But though September 15 was the turning-point it was by no means the end of the Battle of Britain. Day after day London faced more bombing attacks, of

which those on September 27, September 30 and October 5 were particularly heavy. But the Luftwaffe was fighting a losing battle, conquered by the endurance of our fighter pilots and the toughness of the British public.

Everywhere life went on in spite of the raids. There were many adjustments: London cinemas ended their programmes at 9 p.m., most of the theatres closed until further notice, and Londoners began to use tube stations as air-raid shelters—at first unofficially, later with official sanction. When shops had their windows smashed by bomb blast, they quickly re-opened with little peep-hole panes of glass set in the middle of large wooden boards taking the windows' place.

Already there was a long and growing list of people who had lost their homes in raids. The Lord Mayor of London opened an Air Raid Distress Fund, which raised £500,000 in its first week, and the councils of 14 London boroughs were ordered to take over empty houses to accommodate homeless people.

The civilian death-roll was heavy. In August 1,075 men, women and children were killed in Britain by enemy bombs; in September the figure grew to 6,954 and in October it was 6,334. Yet an American newspaper correspondent in London calculated that, at the existing rate of damage and casualties, it would have taken Hitler 40 years to wipe out London and its people.

After a big raid on October 5 Goering decided that daylight attacks were too expensive, and the Luftwaffe began to concentrate its efforts more and more on night bombing. On October 14 London suffered what was described as "the fiercest night raid of the war". Bombs fell on the city every few minutes, and low-diving tactics were used for the first time.

But the Battle of Britain was now ending—and Britain had won. In the three months ending October 31 Fighter Command lost 857 aircraft, and the German aircraft which were actually destroyed, as checked by German records after the war, totalled 1,569. Though this is not such a big total as was supposed at the time, the German losses were enough to show Goering that there was no future in that kind of battle. So the Battle of Britain was followed by the "Blitz"—the long and harassing period of night raids on London and the provinces.

Victory was a triumph for Fighter Command as a whole—for Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, for New Zealand-born Air Marshal Sir Keith Park, who commanded No. 11 Fighter Group which bore the greatest weight of the battle, and above all for every single fighter pilot who dared and defeated Goering's bombers. Where all were so brave, it would be wrong to single out individual names for special mention.

There were other heroes at that time as well as the gallant and unforgettable "few". Five young men of a London bomb disposal squad saved St. Paul's Cathedral from almost certain destruction by digging out an unexploded time-bomb which had fallen close to the front steps. When the King instituted (on September 23) the George Cross to reward acts of courage arising out of enemy action, the leader of the St. Paul's bomb disposal squad was one of the first three recipients of the new decoration. The others were Sapper G. C. Wylie, who actually found the bomb, and T. H. Alderson, leader of a Bridlington A.R.P. rescue squad, who was honoured for bravery during air raids.

Bomber Command was also extremely active in these months. It made frequent attacks on the docks at Boulogne, Calais, Dunkirk, Ostend and Antwerp, where

Hitler was assembling ships for the projected invasion of Britain.

Sergeant Jock Hannah, an 18-year-old wireless operator and air gunner, was the hero of one of these raids. He was one of the crew of a Hampden bomber of 83 Squadron which was sent to bomb Antwerp on September 15. This bomber was hit several times as it flew through heavy anti-aircraft fire to drop its bombs, and eventually was set on fire by an incendiary bomb which made it a blazing target for all the German anti-aircraft gunners. By great efforts the pilot—Pilot Officer C. A. H. Connor—kept control and flew out of range of the guns. He then ordered the crew to bale out, but Hannah stayed on board. He would not leave pilot and plane to certain destruction as soon as the flames reached the petrol tank.

First with the fire extinguishers, and later (when these were empty) with his hands and the log-book, Hannah fought the fire, and at last, when the plane was limping home over the North Sea, he reported to Connor: "The fire is out, sir." He had suffered terribly. His face was badly burned, and his flying suit was scorched all over; yet he was grinning as he gave Connor the good news, and he jumped calmly out of the charred aircraft when it landed on a Lincolnshire airfield.

For his gallantry Hannah was awarded the Victoria Cross and became the youngest holder of this honour since the war had begun. He was invalided out of the R.A.F. in 1943 with a pension of £3 a week and died of tuberculosis in 1947.

While the air struggle was at its height other aspects of the war made comparatively little impact on Britain. It was about this time that de Gaulle had his unfortunate affair at Dakar, in French West Africa. This French colony had remained faithful to Pétain and the

Vichy Government, but in September de Gaulle had reason to believe that it could be persuaded to join the Free French. This would have been a relief to Britain, since the big French battleship, *Richelieu*, was in harbour at Dakar, and we were anxious that it should not fall into German hands. In September a Free French expeditionary force, supported by British naval vessels, went to French West Africa. But the plan miscarried. The Dakar garrison would not transfer its allegiance, and de Gaulle's mission ended in slightly ridiculous failure.

It was also at this time that Hitler made a resolute effort to bring Spain into the war on the Axis side. After a meeting with Laval in Paris he went to Hendaye, on the Franco-Spanish frontier, to confer with General Franco, the Spanish dictator. But Franco made such high demands for his entry into the war that Hitler could only reject them. He said later that he would rather have three or four of his teeth out than go through such a conference again. So Spain kept out of the war, both then and afterwards. It is probable that Franco deliberately made impossible demands in order to avoid joining the Axis.

At home there were still more signs of austerity and still more war-time restrictions. In August 28 people were fined in Dorset for buying butter at 2*s.* 6*d.* a lb., when the Government-controlled price was 1*s.* 7*d.* On October 19 it was announced that home sales of silk stockings and underclothes would be prohibited after November 30. All such goods which were made in Britain were to be exported, so as to bring in revenue for war purposes.

One happy incident of that October will be remembered by millions of British people throughout the Commonwealth. On Sunday, October 13, Princess

Elizabeth made her first broadcast. It was a three-minute message to the children of the Commonwealth and it was notable for the ease and confidence with which she spoke. At the end she was heard to whisper "Come on, Margaret", and Princess Margaret joined her in saying "Good-night, children".

So the critical months of the Battle of Britain ended with Britain still fighting on, alone and unconquerable. But the air was by no means the only battlefield. There was also the sea. The last week of October brought ominous news that British merchant shipping losses had been the heaviest for any week of the war, except for the week which included the evacuation of Dunkirk. The U-boats were gaining strength every month.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD NEWS FROM AFRICA

As the Battle of Britain ended Mussolini, the Italian dictator, decided to take a more active part in the war. He was not pleased with the way things were going. So far his alliance with Hitler had brought him no spoils except the French Riviera town of Mentone, while Hitler, in addition to his open conquests, had now bullied Rumania into becoming an Axis satellite. King Carol of Rumania had abdicated in favour of his son, Michael, and the Nazi-minded General Antonescu had become Rumanian Prime Minister and dictator.

Mussolini felt that he was still only a junior partner in the Berlin-Rome Axis. Indeed, he was no longer even the only junior partner, for in September Count Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law and Foreign Minister, was summoned to Berlin to sign a new pact which extended the Axis to Tokyo.

Japan, who had invaded China in 1937 and was still at war with her, now lined up with her fellow-aggressors. The Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis pact bound the three countries "to assist one another with all political, economic and military measures if one of the high contracting parties should be attacked by a Power not at present engaged in the European war or in the Sino-Japanese conflict". This pact was clearly intended to warn the United States to keep out of the war.

Mussolini could wait no longer. He was afraid that peace might be re-established before Italy had any

substantial gains. Greece seemed a suitable target for Italian aggression, and on October 15 he explained his plans to his political and Service chiefs. He intended to occupy Greece completely and bring her into the Italian political and economic sphere. This would not only enhance Italy's prestige, but would also provide a counter-balance to British power and interests in the Mediterranean.

Mussolini did not tell Hitler what he was going to do, for Hitler was strongly opposed to any independent action by Italy. Before dawn on October 28, 1940, the Italian Minister in Athens woke up General Metaxas, the Greek Premier, and presented an ultimatum. This announced that Italy was about to invade Greece by land, sea and air at 6 a.m., and ordered Metaxas to hand the whole country over to the invaders. Metaxas rejected the ultimatum, rallied Greece to resist the attack and called on Britain to honour a promise of help given by Chamberlain in 1939.

British sympathy was at once aroused by this unprovoked attack. Churchill telegraphed to Metaxas: "We will give you all the help in our power. We will fight a common foe and we will share a united victory." Two days later British forces entered Suda Bay, on the Greek island of Crete, by arrangement with the Greek Government. Churchill had quickly realised that Crete was a key-point which Italy must not be allowed to seize.

It was soon clear that Mussolini was not going to enjoy the *Blitzkrieg* success which Hitler had had in Eastern and Western Europe. In fact, he had no success at all.

His land armies invaded Greece through Albania, which he had overrun and occupied in 1939. But the Greek Army, commanded by General Papagos, held

the passes against the invaders and out-manoeuvred them at every turn. Greece had only 16 divisions against Italy's 27. But at the end of the year the Italians had been driven back 30 miles behind the Albanian frontier. The legend of Hitler's invincibility had still to be disproved. But Mussolini, as most people had suspected all along, was a much less formidable foe.

The Greek campaign was not far advanced before Mussolini had further reason to regret his impetuous action. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet, judged that a suitable moment had come for striking a naval blow against Italy. On November 11 bombers from the aircraft-carrier *Illustrious* attacked Italian warships in their base at Taranto. They torpedoed three battleships, hit a cruiser and severely damaged the dockyard. By this single stroke the Italian Fleet was crippled for several months.

A few days earlier Churchill had cheerfully told the British people: "It's a grand life if you don't weaken." It was a good motto for Britain in that second winter of the war. For although she was feeling the weight of Hitler's bombs she could take pride in the many brave deeds which proved that British people were not weakening.

It was on November 5, 1940, that the British armed merchant cruiser, *Jervis Bay*, while escorting a convoy of 37 ships some hundreds of miles west of Ireland, encountered the German pocket-battleship, *Admiral Scheer*. The commander of the *Jervis Bay* was Captain Fogarty Fegen, R.N., whose father and grandfather had held high rank in the Navy. He knew that his own vessel, which had only a few 6-inch guns and no armour-plating, was no match for the *Admiral Scheer*, which had six 11-inch and eight 5.9-inch guns; but he

knew also that unless he joined battle the whole convoy would be destroyed by the raider. He decided to fight for as long as he could, so as to give the convoy a chance to disperse and escape.

It was a glorious but hopeless battle. All the *Jervis Bay*'s shells fell short of the *Admiral Scheer*, while the German shells struck her again and again. One shell shattered Fegen's arm, but he still directed the fight until his ship went down in flames.

He had done what he meant to do. While the *Jervis Bay* engaged the *Admiral Scheer* the great majority of ships in the convoy had escaped to safety. One which caught fire and was abandoned, the *San Demetrio*, was reboarded next day by part of her crew, who brought her into a British port with her valuable cargo of 7,000 tons of petrol, though they had neither compasses nor other instruments to guide them.

Captain Fegen died, but was not forgotten. He was awarded the Victoria Cross, and will always have his honoured place among the greatest heroes of British naval history. His officers and crew share his glory. When honours were awarded to other men of the *Jervis Bay*, the *London Gazette* added: "Among those who went down in the *Jervis Bay* there must have been many, and among the survivors others, whose gallantry, were the whole truth known, deserved decoration. The awards should be taken as an honour to their ship as well as to those who earned them."

In the midst of so many dramatic happenings another momentous event of November, 1940, made less impression on the general public. This was the revelation that British scientists had discovered a new substance which existed in a certain type of mould, and that they hoped it would be of great value in the treatment of many serious diseases. It had still to be proved, how-

ever, that the new discovery would be as effective in reducing suffering and saving life as laboratory tests had suggested, and, indeed, the active principle which made it work had not as yet been isolated. The name of this strange new substance was penicillin.

December brought wonderful news to Britain. So far the war had been largely a chronicle of German successes and dogged British resistance. At last Britain was able to celebrate a real victory of her own in North Africa.

The position in North Africa at that time was that General Sir Archibald Wavell, British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, had about two divisions, with a very modest support of tanks, aircraft and guns, in Egypt, which was Britain's traditional base for Mediterranean defence. In the adjoining country of Libya, which was then under Italy's rule, the Italian commander, Marshal Graziani, had some 250,000 troops with full mechanised, artillery and aerial support.

Minor military activity had taken place in the summer, after which the advanced forces of both armies settled down in fortified positions on the Egyptian side of the frontier—the Italians at Sidi Barrani, the British and Commonwealth forces at Mersa Matruh, some 80 miles east. In view of Graziani's great superiority in numbers, it seemed to be his turn next.

But Wavell thought differently, which was not surprising in view of his great military talents. He had been Lord Allenby's Chief of Staff in the Middle East in the First World War. He had written Allenby's biography and had given a series of impressive lectures on the art of generalship. He was soon to show that he could practise what he preached.

It was Wavell's good fortune to have under his command a brilliant tank leader, Lieut.-General Sir Richard

O'Connor, who not only worked out the plan of battle but was also responsible for the vital tactical decisions as the operations proceeded. Wavell and O'Connor were as remarkable a team as Alexander and Montgomery were to become in later years.

On December 9 Wavell and O'Connor mounted their offensive. The first day's reports of the fighting told of the capture of 1,000 Italian prisoners. Another day brought in 4,000 more, and Churchill told the House of Commons: "The Army of the Nile has advanced. We can say that the preliminary stage has been successful." Two days later, when 20,000 Italians had been taken prisoner, he called the action "a victory of the first order".

O'Connor continued to advance after the successful battle of Sidi Barrani. Soon his forces had crossed the frontier into Libya, and the Navy gave useful help by bombarding the Libyan port of Bardia. Then the pace of the advance slowed down, but in January British tanks and troops of the 6th Australian Division captured Bardia, where several Italian generals were added to the list of prisoners. Still pressing along the coast, the Australians took the fortified post of Tobruk, and in the same week another blow was struck against Mussolini's African Empire by a British invasion of the Italian territory of Eritrea.

This was the good news that Britain had needed. Soon British and Commonwealth forces were attacking all the Italian territories in Africa—Libya, Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia.

In February the Italians in Libya were running back to Benghazi at a speed of 20 miles a day, and even when they reached it they did not stop there. Though still outnumbered—in one action 13 British tanks met and defeated 45 Italian tanks—O'Connor's forces won

the Battle of Benghazi and pushed on to El Agheila, on the borders of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.

There they halted. Italy was routed. The threat to Egypt was removed. Britain had won the first round in the desert war.

It was certainly the "victory of the first order" which Churchill had claimed. In two months the British and Commonwealth forces had advanced 500 miles and virtually annihilated Italian armies eight times their size. They had captured or killed 150,000 Italians, including nineteen generals. Their own casualties had been fewer than 2,000.

Good news had come from Africa, and more came soon afterwards, as Wavell's other generals got into their stride. General Alan Cunningham (brother of Admiral Cunningham, the victor of Taranto) invaded and conquered Italian Somaliland. The Italians were driven out of Eritrea and Abyssinia. Wavell, who had done so much with such limited resources, was hailed as the first great British general of the war.

The news was especially welcome to a country still suffering from heavy German bombing raids. That winter the Luftwaffe went in force to the provinces. On November 14, 1940, Coventry had the worst raid of the whole war. It was attacked by 500 German aircraft, which dropped 600 tons of bombs and thousands of incendiaries. The centre of the city was wrecked and 400 people were killed. Other cities which suffered gravely in the winter of 1940–41 were Bristol, Southampton, Liverpool, Plymouth, Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow.

London remained one of the bombers' principal targets. Broadcasting House was hit by a bomb while an announcer (Bruce Belfrage) was reading the news bulletin—but he merely coughed and went on reading. At

the end of December a fierce raid on London set Guildhall on fire and destroyed many Wren churches. But St. Paul's was still unscathed, except for small scars on its roof.

For the most part the Nazi raids revealed the good qualities and neighbourly spirit of the British people. But there were a few cases of looting after raids, and a man at Sheffield was sentenced to ten years' penal servitude for this offence.

All this time Britain was still living under the threat of invasion as well as the certainty of bombing. In December, 1940, one of Hitler's generals, Field-Marshal von Brauchitsch, promised that the German Army would invade Britain as soon as Hitler gave the word. We had survived what was probably the most dangerous year in our history, but we could not yet feel that we were safe. A public opinion poll showed that two out of every three Britons expected that Hitler would at least try to invade Britain in 1941.

One heartening factor was the knowledge that more help was soon coming from the United States. Roosevelt had been re-elected President for a third four-year term. He celebrated his re-election by saying bluntly that " the Axis Powers are not going to win this war " and that the United States must be " the arsenal of democracy ". He sent his great friend, Harry Hopkins, to Britain to give him a first-hand report on the situation. He also gave practical proof of his good intentions by announcing an immensely important new plan for helping Britain.

The basis of the plan was that Britain should receive American war supplies on loan and (in theory) give them back after the war. This was the first intimation of the great American war contribution which came to be known as Lease-Lend. It was very welcome to Bri-

tain, which by then had almost exhausted her overseas financial resources in buying war materials. Churchill hailed Roosevelt's offer with enthusiasm, and on February 9 broadcast a rousing message to the United States: "Give us the tools and we will finish the job."

By this time the war had begun to affect every phase of British life. On New Year's Day, 1941, while Hitler was boasting that the coming year would bring "the completion of the greatest victory in our history", the British Government announced that fire-watching was to be made compulsory. Every citizen might have to take a share in the nightly watch for fires caused by incendiary bombs.

To save steel, the manufacture of safety-razor blades was cut to one-quarter of the normal output. To save food, café and restaurant meals were restricted, and it became an offence (which could be punished by as much as two years' imprisonment or a £500 fine) to serve a meal in a public eating-place containing more than *one* of these courses—fish, meat, poultry, game, eggs, cheese. To run the war, Britain was spending £12,500,000 a day, of which £10,500,000 was exclusively for war purposes. This was more than double her expenditure a year earlier.

Two daring exploits in the early part of 1941 made it clear that Britain could strike—though only on a limited scale—in Europe as well as in Africa. The success of the German airborne operations had taught us a lesson, and we had begun to build up a substantial force of parachute troops. In February a detachment of these troops was dropped in southern Italy, with the intention of blowing up the enormous aqueduct in the Apulia province, which supplied 302 Italian towns with water. This was the biggest aqueduct in the world, and,

although the British parachutists did not succeed in destroying it, they did considerable damage.

The raiders had been told to make their way to the Italian coast after they had blown up (or tried to blow up) the aqueduct, and there embark in a British submarine which would be waiting for them. This cross-country journey proved to be impossible, and they were all taken prisoner. But they had thoroughly scared Italy, and had shown our enemies that we were now fully equipped for launching parachute attacks.

The other British raid—early in March—was on the German-occupied Lofoten Islands, off Norway, where the technique which came to be known as Combined Operations was skilfully carried out. Naval and military forces, with air support, made a surprise landing on these islands, which were the Nazis' biggest single source of glycerine for explosives.

These raiders took the Germans completely by surprise. They destroyed factories and shipping, and took a large number of prisoners, both Germans and Norwegian supporters of the traitor Quisling. Loyal Norwegians had good cause to be pleased with the British landing, since our troops took with them supplies of chocolate, cocoa, tobacco, cigarettes, flannel, leather and knitting wool, which they distributed among the inhabitants.

The Norwegians' only regret was that the British invaders had not come to stay. But in March, 1941, Britain had not the power to liberate Nazi-occupied territory. The tide of war had not yet turned. It was still running strongly in Hitler's favour, as events in South-East Europe were soon to show.

CHAPTER VIII

GREEK TRAGEDY

In the Spring of 1941 Hitler prepared to strike out in new directions. He had brought Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria under his control without fighting. Now he turned his attention to Greece and Yugoslavia, so as to complete his domination of South-East Europe.

The Greeks were still holding the Italians. Mussolini's invasion campaign had been a complete failure. But it was one thing for the Greeks to fight the Italians, and quite another for them to fight the all-conquering Germans. That was the fate they were soon to face.

It was Yugoslavia's turn first. In March she was brusquely ordered by Hitler to join the Axis. At first her Government held out against his demands. Then Hitler became impatient. He gave Yugoslavia an ultimatum and summoned the Premier and other Ministers to Vienna to sign a pact with him.

Britain was quick to warn Yugoslavia that she would not condone any action which put the Yugoslavs on the Axis side. The Yugoslav people were against agreement with Germany, and there were anti-Axis riots in the streets of Belgrade. Yet the Government and the Regent, Prince Paul, felt there was no alternative to accepting Hitler's demands.

At the last moment they were prevented from selling their country. Early on March 28, in the words Churchill used when he passed on the news to the House of Commons, "the Yugoslav nation found its soul". An

Air Force officer, General Simovic, took control of the Government. Ministers were placed under arrest, the Regent was dismissed and Peter, the boy-King, became the true leader of his people at this fateful hour. Yugoslavia mobilised and prepared to fight the Germans rather than join the Axis.

It was a brave but hopeless resistance. In the first week of April Hitler bombed Belgrade and sent mechanised columns over the Yugoslav border. At the same time he attacked Greece. It seemed inevitable that two more countries would be added to his list of conquests.

This was not the only bad news at the beginning of April. For Britain was unpleasantly surprised to hear that Wavell's forces in North Africa had evacuated their advanced post at Benghazi and were withdrawing across Libya.

A new phase had now begun in the Western Desert campaigns. Hitherto Britain and the Commonwealth had been fighting Italians and had had no difficulty in routing them. Now a sterner enemy was in the field. Hitler had taken over from Mussolini the Axis leadership in the desert war.

Though Italian forces still fought in Africa, a special German army corps, known as the *Afrika Korps,* was trained in Austria for desert fighting and was sent to Tripolitania under the command of General Rommel, for whom Hitler had a particularly high regard. This was one of the occasions on which Hitler's judgment was right, for Rommel, who had risen rapidly from colonel to general and was soon to become a field-marshal, was a bold and skilful commander in armoured war. His *Afrika Korps* had a long run of successes, which were broken only when Rommel was matched by the even more skilful generalship of Alexander and Montgomery.

On reaching Africa Rommel concentrated his forces east of Tripoli and prepared to advance into the Western Desert at the very time when Wavell had to weaken his forces to send troops to Greece.

That was the real explanation of our sudden withdrawal from Benghazi. Our General Staff had expected for some time that Hitler would make new attacks in South-East Europe. In the hope of barring his way, Wavell had been ordered to prepare a Balkans Expeditionary Force, which could land in Greece if necessary. With the small forces at his disposal Wavell could not both hold a vast area of North Africa and send troops to Greece. So Britain retreated in Libya, in order to allow an Imperial force of British, Australians and New Zealanders to be despatched for a Greek campaign.

This withdrawal from Benghazi was a sad blow to British prestige. It came, too, at a time when the increase in income tax to ten shillings in the £ had brought the cost of the war still more forcibly home to the British people. As a sop to taxpayers the Government announced that the extra income tax payable because of reduced earned income and personal allowances would be paid back after the war. This was the beginning of the "post-war credits" scheme which Lord Keynes had proposed some eighteen months earlier. No doubt the Coalition Government thought that the scheme was a feasible one, but eleven years after the end of the war the great bulk of these credits had not been repaid.

The troops who had been sent to Greece under General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson had to fight a losing battle all the time. Yugoslavia had quickly collapsed before the German onslaught and soon gave up the fight; the Greek Army, exhausted by its heroic campaigns against the Italians, was in no condition to meet

and repel a new and stronger enemy; and once again, as in Norway a year earlier, the Germans had marked superiority in the air. On one occasion in this campaign a single British Hurricane had to do battle with 27 German bombers.

As reports flowed in of Commonwealth forces falling back to new positions in Greece, and then withdrawing further to shorten their line, it seemed to be Norway all over again. A gallant attempt was made to hold a Thermopylae Line—from Mount Parnassus to the Aegean Sea—but this rearguard action was itself abandoned when news came that the Greek Army had surrendered, the Greek King and Government had left for Crete, and the Greek Government had asked Britain to withdraw her forces from the mainland.

The Commonwealth had no reason to be ashamed of this defeat. It was tragic, indeed, that Greece should have been overwhelmed by Germany after her great fight against Italy. But neither Britain nor her Commonwealth partners had enough resources at that time to turn the scale in Greece. We had promised to send help. We had honoured our pledge. It was not Britain's fault that she could not save Greece from the hardships of Nazi occupation.

The news from Africa was equally disturbing. At the very outset of Rommel's advance an unlucky accident hampered the British operations. Two high British officers—General O'Connor, Commanding Officer in the Western Desert, and General Sir Philip Neame, V.C.—were up at the front to direct the British withdrawal, and were captured by a German side-car patrol as they made a detour in their car to avoid a long convoy of British lorries heading eastwards. O'Connor had shown himself to be a brilliant tank general when he routed the Italians, and it was most unfortunate that he was

not on hand in the difficult months which followed.

Rommel's tanks raced across the desert, and Wavell's depleted African forces had to give up the vast area they had conquered so brilliantly only a few months before. Yet one obstacle held up the German advance towards Egypt. Wavell had ordered an Australian division to make for Tobruk, on the Mediterranean coast, and to hold it as a fortress against all German assaults. It was a daring plan, but it worked. Rommel swept on to Bardia, and further east, but left Tobruk behind as a Commonwealth bastion.

Tobruk had originally been fortified by the Italians. The Australians now used the Italian fortifications to hold off the *Afrika Korps* and did so with great success. The first German attack was beaten off with heavy losses. In a week 33 German and Italian tanks were destroyed in the Tobruk area, about 1,500 prisoners taken and 24 German aircraft brought down. At the end of a fortnight's resistance an Australian band was jubilantly playing in Tobruk every day.

The emergence of this unexpected " pocket " of Commonwealth resistance diverted some of the strength that Rommel had meant to use in his drive towards Egypt. His advance lost impetus and slowed down on the Egyptian frontier. There it was firmly held by fresh troops sent out from Cairo. Libya was lost, but Egypt was saved.

At the beginning of May Britain heard with relief that at least 48,000 of the 60,000 Commonwealth troops sent to Greece had been safely evacuated. But as Churchill had pointed out at the time of Dunkirk, wars are not won by evacuations. There was still no sign that Britain had the power to beat the Germans.

Oddly enough, one apparent sign of our growing power was shown later to have been quite erroneous.

It seemed magnificent to hear that Britain's newest battleship, which had just undergone her trials, was the best in the world and had been made "virtually unsinkable" by the clever sub-division of her interior into watertight compartments. The name of this ship was the *Prince of Wales*. Her claim to be "unsinkable" was soon disproved by the Japanese.

New offers of American help provided cheering news. Roosevelt announced that United States warships would patrol and protect the Western Atlantic, and before long the whole of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet was engaged on this valuable patrol duty. A little later Roosevelt proclaimed "an unlimited state of national emergency" in the United States.

Air raids over Britain were still being carried out on a formidable scale. Early in May Merseyside had a series of heavy raids in which the centre of Liverpool suffered severely. In a Birmingham raid a member of the Home Guard lost his life while saving others trapped in a gas-filled room. He was awarded the George Cross, and was the first man in the Home Guard to receive this honour. Reports and photographs of all such raids were subject to strict censorship, and the public were not allowed to take photographs of bomb damage without official permission. In May a 91-year-old peer was fined £10 for breaking this rule.

This same month of May provided one of the most astonishing happenings of the war. Late one evening the Press received the almost incredible news that Rudolf Hess, a leading Nazi who ranked as Hitler's Deputy, had flown alone from Germany to Scotland and landed there. Hess was a man who had, on the whole, a better reputation in Britain than most of his fellow-Nazis. He was regarded as one of the more moderate leaders, though the fact that he was in the thick of Nazi plots

and planning could not be disputed. But why had he flown to Britain? That was the question which puzzled everyone. It was not to be officially answered for a long time.

Some details of the Hess affair were made public at once. It was revealed that he had piloted his own plane and had come to Scotland to see the Duke of Hamilton, whom he had met at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. Since the Duke was neither a politician nor a pro-German, this revelation did not bring much enlightenmet. People wondered whether Hess had quarreled with Hitler and flown to Britain to save his life, or whether his flight was, in fact, some subtle trick of Hitler's own.

The real truth, which was revealed at a later stage of the war, was that Hess had come here entirely on his own initiative, and without Hitler's knowledge or consent, because he had conceived the lunatic idea that he, and he alone, was the man to bring Britain to her senses and make her give up the war against Germany.

He had expected that the Duke of Hamilton would be able to put him in touch with leading politicians, and, as it turned out, the Duke did have an interview with him and reported his offer to Churchill. It was a promise that Germany would agree to respect the integrity of the British Empire if Britain, on her side, would stop fighting and would give Germany a free hand in Europe. Hess also stated that Hitler intended to make certain demands on Stalin, but he said there was no truth in rumours that Germany was about to attack Russia. This denial did not convince Churchill, who soon afterwards warned Stalin to prepare for a German invasion. Stalin did not take the warning seriously.

Needless to say, the Government would have nothing

to do with Hess, who was interned for the rest of the war, and it was not impressed by his peace offer. Only a slightly crazy individual, as Hess undoubtedly was, could have imagined that Britain would abandon her old principle of maintaining the balance of power in Europe and would trust Hitler's good will for the continued existence of the Commonwealth. The Hess affair was a nine days' wonder, but it had no effect on the course of the war.

While Britain was still buzzing with rumours and speculations about Hess, a brave and remarkable Englishman was killed at a research station in Richmond Park. This was the 35-year-old Earl of Suffolk, twentieth holder of a title first created in 1337 and husband of a popular musical comedy actress of the nineteen-twenties, Mimi Crawford.

The Earl had had a surprising war career. In 1940 he had been *Ministry of Supply liaison officer to the* French Government, and when Paris was about to fall he had driven hastily round the city, collecting everything valuable he could find in banks, jewellers' shops, laboratories and business premises, telling the somewhat bewildered Frenchmen that he was taking his haul to Britain for safe keeping. In this way he amassed £1,000,000 worth of diamonds, together with rare chemicals, scientific formulae and blue-prints of new inventions which would otherwise have fallen into German hands. He loaded them all into a car and drove to the French coast, where after some delay he was able to seize a small French steamer and persuade her crew to take him to England. In London he handed over his whole collection to the Ministry of Supply.

From this " cloak and dagger " adventure he turned to the more prosaic but no less dangerous task of examining unexploded bombs. One of them exploded

while he was working on it in his laboratory. The Earl and seven other people were killed. One of the others was the Earl's secretary, 28-year-old Eileen Morden, who was always on hand to take notes while he was carrying out his perilous experiments. After his death Lord Suffolk was awarded the George Cross.

Two new phases of the war were begun—and ended—in May. British troops had a short and successful campaign in Iraq, where the pro-German dictator, Rashid Ali, had set up a régime that would soon have placed the country in Hitler's hands. The British action quickly ended his plotting.

Crete was a different matter. This was the Greek island to which British troops had been evacuated from the Greek mainland. It had great strategic value in the Eastern Mediterranean, and when British forces had first been sent there in 1940, by arrangement with the Greek Government, Churchill had hoped that its harbour of Suda Bay would become an "amphibious citadel".

In fact, owing to the many other demands on our Middle East Command's resources, it was far from being the floating fortress that Churchill had meant it to be. In May, 1941, after the fall of Greece, Crete had a garrison of about 27,500 Commonwealth troops, of whom nearly half were Australians and New Zealanders. General B. C. Freyberg, the distinguished New Zealand soldier, was in command. Greek and Cretan soldiers added to the total, but air defences were scanty. Britain intended to hold the island, though the Nazis' control of the Greek mainland made its position very precarious.

The weakness of our position was soon made clear. On May 20 Churchill told the House of Commons that number of Nazi paratroops and airborne troops had

landed in Crete, but added hopefully that they were being rounded up. For once Churchill's optimism was not justified.

The German attack on Crete began with a tremendous air raid. Large numbers of German aircraft dropped bombs all over the island; the few R.A.F. fighters which Wavell could spare from Africa and the rare anti-aircraft batteries could do little to check the onslaught, which was directed from airfields in German-occupied Greece.

This bombing began early in the morning. It was followed by a brief lull. Then the planes came back—not bombers this time, but a huge fleet of troop-carriers, bearing hundreds of parachutists who dropped near aerodromes and other vital points in the island.

Early reports that reached Britain made light of this airborne invasion. British military opinion at that time held that ground troops would always be more than a match for parachutists. But British military opinion was wrong. These well-trained German soldiers proved that parachute operations could be a fully effective form of military attack, not just a diversionary exercise meant to cause trouble. For example, one group of parachutists, frequently reinforced from the air, waged a three days' battle for the important Maleme aerodrome, which they eventually captured in spite of the brave defence put up by a handful of New Zealanders.

The parachutists were only the German advance-guard. On the second and third days the Germans ran what one observer called "a regular bus service" of troop-carrying planes and gliders, which landed air-borne troops in large numbers. The operation was costly for Germany. Two or three hundred gliders were shot down or were wrecked on landing. But the men—there were 40 in each glider—were not always killed on

wounded even when the gliders were wrecked. The Nazis got their men into Crete, and apparently did not mind how much it cost them to do so.

This was a new kind of airborne war. It took the defenders completely by surprise, and, although our men were still holding their ground by May 23, the Battle of Crete was really lost when the airborne landings began. Only substantial numbers of fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns could have seriously disputed the landings, and our forces in Crete were poorly equipped in both these forms of defence.

By now Britain had begun to realise that the early optimism had been quite unjustified, and that the situation in Crete was alarming. Yet it was still hoped that airborne landings could not provide sufficient strength to capture the island. So long as our Navy held Suda Bay, surely Crete could not be lost.

Unhappily Suda Bay, like the great Malayan harbour of Singapore, was vulnerable from the land side. The invaders who had captured the Maleme airfield next advanced towards the harbour, meeting on their way a desperate resistance by Australians, New Zealanders and Royal Marines. This was a tragic battle for the Marines. There were 2,000 of them in Crete, and more than 1,400 were lost in the defence of Suda Bay.

Their efforts were unavailing. Suda Bay had to be abandoned. When the Commonwealth troops moved to a new defence line west of the harbour, it was only too plain that all Crete was lost. The wearied defenders, who had been fighting almost continuously for six days, withdrew to the south coast beaches in readiness for evacuation.

It was in these hazardous days that Second Lieutenant Charles Hazlett Upham, a New Zealander, performed the gallant deeds that won him his first Victoria

Cross. (He won the Victoria Cross again in 1942 in the Western Desert.) The story of all that he did is too long to tell here. Among other actions he carried a wounded man to safety under heavy fire; advanced 600 yards through the German lines to rescue a New Zealand company which had been cut off; killed two Germans by shamming dead when they fired at him and then secretly raising his rifle to fire back at them; and finally lay in wait for a German advance party, of which he killed 22 men and dispersed the others by Bren gun and rifle fire. All the time he was suffering from wounds and dysentery, and was too ill to eat.

The Greek and Cretan tragedy was nearly over. From beaches and ports the Commonwealth troops were taken to Egypt by naval vessels. With them went King George of Greece and his Government. At the beginning of June it was announced that nearly 15,000 troops were safe in Egypt. This was welcome news—but there had been 27,500 troops in Crete when the fighting began. British, Australians and New Zealanders had all lost heavily. The highest proportionate losses were among the Australians. Out of their 6,450 men in Crete only 2,890 were evacuated.

The Battle of Crete had been lost in the air. Britain had had only three airfields in Crete itself, and those further away in North Africa were at the extreme limit of the Hurricanes' range. So the Germans were able to land 35,000 highly-trained troops in Crete, together with doctors and medical supplies. Freyberg claimed that the defence of Crete had held up German plans for further operations, and had used up resources that Germany might have sent to the Middle East or the Western Desert. Even so, it was disillusioning for Britain to realise that yet another of our military operations had ended in evacuation.

Yet even in times of gloom and defeat a single piece of good news could quickly raise the public morale. This very month of reverses in Crete and Africa ended with the excitement of the Navy's successful hunt of the German battleship, *Bismarck*. That was part of another, longer battle—the Battle of the Atlantic.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

THE Battle of the Atlantic must have a chapter to itself. Its progress was of the utmost importance throughout the war, but for security reasons the public was largely kept in the dark about the details of the battle. It would not have been prudent to let Germany know how many British or Allied merchant ships had been sunk in a particular area or at a particular time.

Early in the war the figures of losses were published periodically. Later they were withheld. So while Britain knew how her soldiers and her airmen were faring, she had only vague indications of what was going on in the great Atlantic battle between the U-boats and their hunters. Since so many of the events were not made known until long after they had happened, it seems best to link them together now in one chapter.

As soon as the war broke out, everyone expected that Germany would attack our merchant shipping. She had done so in the First World War. She was certain to do so again. If she had ever succeeded in stopping the flow of arms, food, raw materials and other supplies across the Atlantic, Britain could no longer have held out against her with any chance of success. Britain was determined to keep the trade routes open. Thanks to the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy and the R.A.F. Coastal Command she kept them open, though at times the cost was very heavy indeed.

The battle began on the very first day of the war

when the passenger liner, *Athenia*, was sunk by a German submarine. But at that time Admiral Doenitz, the fervent Nazi and Hitler-worshipper who commanded the German submarine fleet, had not yet given the order for unrestricted warfare against British merchant shipping.

This slow beginning of the full U-boat war was due to Doenitz's lack of submarines. For the first eighteen months he could never keep more than six to ten U-boats in operation at one time. When the German submarine-building programme was in full swing, as many as 120 U-boats could be simultaneously maintained at sea for several months.

But U-boats were not the only danger at sea. Admiral Raeder, the German naval Commander-in-Chief, had two powerful cruisers, the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau*, under his command, together with a number of the "pocket battleships" that Hitler had built between the wars. Two big battleships—the *Tirpitz* and the *Bismarck*—were being built and were soon put into active use. All these vessels were serious menaces to Allied shipping.

Germany thought, too, that she had another powerful weapon to use against us. Early in the war she dropped magnetic mines in sea-routes used by our merchant vessels. These mines had some success at first, but it was not long before Britain had mastered their secrets.

As soon as it was realised that magnetic mines were taking a toll of British shipping, the Admiralty (under Churchill's direction) decided that one of the mines must be seized and examined, so that defence measures could be worked out. By good luck a German aircraft was seen to drop one of them off Shoeburyness in November, 1939. It lay there in the mud, and soon after midnight two naval officers—Lieut.-Commanders

Ouvry and Lewis—were on their way to Southend to examine the strange object.

Since the tide was rising when Ouvry and Lewis arrived at Southend, they could not begin their work until the early afternoon. It was a risky job, but with the assistance of a Chief Petty Officer and an Able Seaman the two officers dismantled the mine and sent it to Portsmouth for further scrutiny. Effective countermeasures were then devised.

British scientists had provided valuable weapons for our use in the U-boat war. One was asdic—a method of groping for submarines under water by means of sound waves. Destroyers escorting convoys of merchant vessels used asdic to find the exact location and depth of U-boats, which could then be knocked out by depth-charges.

Britain's other great scientific weapon was radar, the "magic eye" invented by Robert Watson-Watt. This system of locating enemy ships or aircraft by means of direction-finding radio waves was no less valuable in the Battle of the Atlantic than in the Battle of Britain. Radar-equipped aircraft of Coastal Command were able to find out where the U-boats lay and deal with them drastically.

Yet the greatest weapons of all in this war at sea were the skill and courage of the Royal Navy and the gallantry and endurance of our merchant seamen. At the height of the U-boat war they knew it was very likely that any voyage would be their last. Yet they pluckily left their homes and went to sea, to bring back the cargoes without which Britain could not wage war. The Red Duster—the flag of the Merchant Navy—was a proud battle-flag in these dangerous years.

After the sinking of the *Athenia* the war at sea was comparatively quiet for several months. In the first

autumn of war Allied shipping losses were only 150,000 tons a month, and they soon fell to 80,000 tons a month. This improvement was due to the introduction of the convoy system. Merchant vessels no longer sailed in isolation, unless, like the *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Queen Mary* which often crossed the Atlantic independently during the war, they were speedy enough to outdistance possible attackers. They now sailed in convoys, protected by naval vessels, usually destroyers. The successful raids of the pocket-battleship, *Graf Spee,* before she came to her ignominious end, had shown the danger of allowing merchant ships to sail on their own, but Britain's trouble was that she had not enough destroyers to give every convoy adequate protection. Moreover, the gallant fight and tragic loss of the *Jervis Bay* showed that convoy defence might exact a heavy price if an escorting vessel was attacked by a more powerful one.

Before the fall of France Doenitz had been handicapped because we had mined the Straits of Dover and his U-boats could not pass through: they had to make a long, roundabout northward journey before they could even begin a raid. But when France had fallen and Germany held the French coast, Doenitz could base his submarines in France and also use long-range aircraft, operating from French airfields, to spot convoys and tell the U-boats where to go. The danger to merchant shipping now became very much greater.

There was another danger, too. Because of our shortage of destroyers, convoys could not be escorted all the way across the Atlantic. At a certain point in the ocean the escort would leave the convoy to make its own way to North America, and would then take a Britain-bound convoy under its protection for the voyage home.

The U-boats were now able to operate beyond the escort limit and did great damage. Though our losses had been so light at the beginning of 1940, 4,000,000 tons of Allied shipping were sunk in the whole year. By then the U-boats were hunting in "wolf-packs" of five or six together. Their success was turning the Battle of the Atlantic in Hitler's favour.

They were no less successful in the first part of 1941 —another year which brought 4,000,000 tons of Allied shipping losses. But at the same time we were able to strike effective blows at the German surface-raiders.

In March of this year the menacing *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* put into Brest for repairs. That was the end of their activities for many months. R.A.F. bombers attacked them again and again as they lay in dock, and they were so badly damaged that it was a long time before they could put to sea again.

Two months later a new German surface-raider came into the Atlantic. This was the great battleship, *Bismarck*, which had been lying in a fjord near Bergen, in Norway. The Navy was keeping close watch on her movements, and when a Fleet Air Arm reconnaissance reported that she had left the fjord the battleships *Hood* and *Prince of Wales* were sent to intercept her. This encounter was disastrous for Britain. The *Hood* was not strongly enough armoured for protection against the *Bismarck*'s heavy fire; a shell hit the *Hood*'s magazine and she blew up. The *Prince of Wales* was also hit, and the *Bismarck* was left free to enter the Atlantic.

The loss of the *Hood* was soon to be avenged. The Navy had its eye on the *Bismarck* and did not intend to let her escape. Though she survived an attack by British torpedo-planes and evaded her pursuers she was spotted again by a Coastal Command flying-boat as she

was making her way to Brest, 600 miles ahead. The Fleet closed in for the kill.

It was what the music-halls would call an "all-star performance". First came the aircraft-carrier, *Ark Royal*, which was still going strong in spite of having been "sunk" so often by Goebbels and "Lord Haw-Haw": her aircraft made a devastating attack which badly damaged the *Bismarck* and reduced her to a very slow speed. Then a destroyer flotilla, under the command of Captain Vian, hero of the *Altmark* incident in 1940, unsuccessfully tried to sink the *Bismarck* with further torpedo attacks. Finally, the big battleships *King George V* and *Rodney* arrived to shatter the fugitive with heavy gunfire.

Even then the *Bismarck* was still afloat. The honour of sending her to the bottom (on May 27, 1941) was reserved for the cruiser *Dorsetshire*. The relentless pursuit and final destruction of this formidable enemy raider were a tonic for Britain in one of the dark periods of the war.

This was the year in which the control of British defence in the Battle of the Atlantic was moved from Plymouth to Liverpool. At the outbreak of war the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, had been responsible for the protection of merchant shipping. But the German conquest of France had exposed Plymouth to daily observation by enemy aircraft, and in any case it was too far away from the great stream of shipping going in and out of the Mersey and the Clyde.

Churchill had prepared for the move to Liverpool while he was First Lord of the Admiralty, and Derby House, in the centre of the city, had been equipped as a naval headquarters, well armoured against air raids. In February, 1941, Admiral Sir Percy Noble was given the new post of Commander-in-Chief, Western Ap-

proaches, and moved into Derby House with a large staff of officers, ratings and Wrens. Liverpool was familiar with seafaring men of all nations. Now its streets were enlivened by naval girls, and its surprised citizens met groups of impeccably turned-out Wrens chatting gaily to each other in Roedean and Cheltenham accents.

In the great Plotting Room at Derby House, where movements of U-boats, convoys and escorts were marked on a huge wall-map, Noble and his staff controlled the Atlantic war. Thanks to their skilful organisation, the vigilance of the escorts and the greater strength of the protecting aircraft, our shipping losses became appreciably fewer by the end of 1941. One man who did a great deal to protect our merchant vessels was Captain F. J. Walker, R.N., the most successful of all U-boat hunters, who had now begun his brilliant tactics of using escort ships not only to guard convoys but also to chase and kill any U-boats which dared to interfere. In one engagement at this time he destroyed four U-boats and two German bombers.

In the closing months of 1941 the average amount of destruction caused by each German submarine at sea had dropped from 400 to 100 tons a day. But in December the United States entered the war, and our patiently-won advantage was suddenly swept aside.

The reason for the worsening of our position in 1942 was that American coastal traffic offered wonderful targets for U-boats. This traffic, which included vessels bringing precious supplies for Britain-bound convoys, was virtually unprotected. At first, indeed, the ships were even silhouetted against shore lights at night, since Miami protested that it would lose its tourist trade if it had to enforce a black-out. So the U-boats moved to the American coast and killed as they chose

until the United States gave the coastal vessels proper protection and told Miami to put its lights out.

In this disastrous year of 1942 the Germans sank 8,000,000 tons of Allied shipping, and the Allied merchant fleets were steadily dwindling. Almost from the beginning of the war the U-boats had sunk Allied ships faster than the shipyards were replacing them. They were still doing so—but not for much longer—at the end of 1942, in spite of the tremendous impetus being given to American shipbuilding.

In November, 1942, Noble went to Washington as Chief of the British Admiralty Delegation, and Admiral Max Horton took his place at Liverpool as Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches. This was like " setting a thief to catch a thief ". Horton had himself been a brilliant submarine commander in the First World War. His intimate knowledge of submarine tactics and his ruthless determination to have his own way served him well when he fought the Battle of the Atlantic.

At Derby House Horton got down to his job with gusto. A Wren officer, Kay Halloran, who died in America after the war, was his Flag Lieutenant, and used her native tact to smooth over awkward situations between the forthright Commander-in-Chief and admiring, though sometimes disgruntled, subordinates. Liverpool people were surprised to find the Commander-in-Chief, Western Approaches, playing golf every afternoon, but there was method in this apparent neglect of duty. The battles between U-boats and convoys were usually fought at night. Horton, refreshed by his afternoon's golf, was back in the Plotting Room at night to follow the battles' progress and give orders for the protection of convoys.

With Horton's backing, Walker and his fellow U-boat hunters developed the system of Support Groups for

convoys, taking "Attack and kill" as their motto. Walker himself was responsible for the destruction of more than 20 U-boats by the groups under his personal command. He died from a stroke—the result of years of stress and strain—in 1944, but by that time the worst of the Battle of the Atlantic, which he had done so much to win, was over. At his funeral service in Liverpool Cathedral Horton said of him: "Not dust nor the light weight of a stone, but all the sea of the Western Approaches shall be his tomb."

Soon after Horton's arrival in Liverpool a new system of Atlantic convoy protection was brought into operation. Britain and Canada took over all responsibility for the Atlantic, while the United States looked after the Mediterranean and other convoys. A Canadian admiral at Halifax was "opposite number" to Horton at Liverpool, and Canadians who had never seen the sea before the war sailed in corvettes halfway across the Atlantic to escort merchant shipping. One of these gallant though inexperienced corvette commanders is said to have met a fellow-Canadian commander in mid-Atlantic, and to have asked him: "What do you think our position is?" The other Canadian replied: "I don't know. I'm a stranger here myself."

These strategic improvements, together with increased use of radar by U-boat hunters, the growing effectiveness of long-range aircraft in finding and killing submarines and the rapid growth of American shipbuilding, were enough to turn the scale in the Battle of the Atlantic. In April, 1943, Doenitz had 235 U-boats in action. By all German calculations they should have wrought immense havoc among Allied shipping. They did not do so. Though the Battle of the Atlantic was not yet over, and was to continue until the last weeks of the war, we had definitely won it.

It was not only that new Allied tonnage was now exceeding losses at sea, but the U-boats were never safe. Their own losses were now mounting up to impressive totals. In the last three months of 1943 only 47 merchant ships were sunk; yet in the same period Germany lost 53 U-boats. Like Goering after the Battle of Britain, even Doenitz could see that there was no future in that kind of war.

Yet he returned to the attack in 1944, when he announced that he would "smash Britain's supplies with a new submarine weapon". This new weapon was the *Schnorkel* (or, as British sailors called it, the "snort"), a breathing-tube leading up to the surface, which allowed a submarine to stay continuously under water and so escape attention from aircraft. The "snort" was used to obtain supplies of fresh air from time to time.

Doenitz's new weapon had a moderate success. U-boats were obviously harder to kill if they never came to the surface, particularly when they crept along the coast and lay hidden among rocks and submerged wrecks. Yet the worst they could do was to bring Allied shipping losses up to 59,000 tons in December—a modest figure compared with the huge losses of two years earlier.

Doenitz had still other "secret weapons" which might have done much damage if the war had continued. These were two new types of U-boats, which could travel under water at higher speeds than submarines had ever previously achieved. One could go at 10 knots and the other at 16. Only two of them were actually at sea by the end of the war, but more than a hundred others were in commission or partially completed. Convoy protection would have been much more difficult if U-boats could have gone faster under the water than the convoys were travelling on the surface.

At its height the Battle of the Atlantic put Britain in deadly peril. If the disastrous losses of 1942 had been repeated in 1943, even American shipbuilding could hardly have gone fast enough to save the situation. Scientists, admirals, captains, escort commanders, ratings, Wrens and the tireless airmen of Coastal Command all played their part in keeping the Western Approaches open for British and Allied ships; but they must share their well-deserved honour with the men who served so bravely in our merchant vessels.

CHAPTER X

RUSSIA INVADED

By the beginning of June, 1941, Wavell's Middle Eastern Forces had completed their defeat of the Italians in Abyssinia and Eritrea, as well as Italian Somaliland; but Rommel's *Afrika Korps* was still poised on the frontier of Egypt. While waiting uneasily for Rommel's next move, the British public had to accustom itself to a new phase of war-time austerity. Clothes rationing was introduced on June 1.

Everyone was now given a fixed number of coupons, and had to surrender some of them, according to a schedule of coupon values, when buying articles of clothing. The ration provided for very much smaller purchases than the average person made in normal times, and it effectively cut down civilian demand for textiles and clothing.

Everyone felt the pinch. Women, in particular, found they could no longer buy their usual numbers of stockings, and some girls tried the experiment of painting their legs with coloured dyes, so as to make themselves look as if they were wearing the stockings they could not acquire. One result of clothes rationing was that women office and factory workers developed the habit of going to work with bare legs. In due time even Government departments gave official approval to bare legs in office hours.

Another important event at home during this month was an announcement by Arthur Greenwood, the

Labour leader who was Minister without Portfolio in the Coalition Government. He explained that he had appointed Sir William Beveridge, the economist, to preside over an inter-departmental committee which would carry out a comprehensive survey of all existing schemes of social insurance.

This was the first step towards the preparation and presentation of the Beveridge Report, which led in its turn to the introduction of post-war social security legislation. It says much for the coolness and confidence of Churchill's war-time Government that, in the middle of a desperate war in which Britain was still fighting without a single major Ally, it could start an inquiry which looked fearlessly forward to peace and victory.

This confidence found further expression at a meeting held in St. James's Palace on June 12, when the British Cabinet and representatives of all the exiled Allied Governments solemnly pledged their determination to go on with the war and not to rest until victory was won.

But could it really be won if the United States remained only a benevolent neutral? That was a difficult question. Even Churchill had doubts about final victory without American participation. On June 16 he broadcast to the American people: "United we stand. Divided we fall. Divided, the dark age returns. United, we can save and guide the world."

After the fall of Crete the Commonwealth forces turned to a fresh theatre of war in the Middle East. Something had to be done about Syria. The French administration of Syria had refused to join forces with General de Gaulle and the Free French. General Dentz, the High Commissioner, remained faithful to Pétain and the Vichy Government.

This was a dangerous situation. If Britain left Syria

alone, the Germans might take over the country, either by gradual infiltration or by direct invasion; and Dentz could hardly be trusted to make any effective resistance. But German occupation of Syria would have isolated Turkey and cleared a path for the Nazis to Iran and Iraq. For safety's sake Britain felt obliged to forestall this German move, even if her action involved the unpleasant duty of fighting against Frenchmen.

Commonwealth forces entered Syria under Maitland Wilson's command on June 7, 1941, and it was at first hoped that the French would put up only a token resistance. This hope was soon shown to be vain. Dentz's troops fought stubbornly, and French prisoners said that their orders had been to "resist to the end".

The end came soon. Wilson was outnumbered by the French, but he out-manoeuvred them. British, Australians and Indians took part in successive advances which carried the invading forces to Damour, Damascus and Beirut. De Gaulle's Free French troops also took part in the campaign, though it was hard for them to have to fight their fellow-countrymen.

The war in Syria was finished in rather more than a month. In the second week of July Dentz asked for an armistice.

With the conquest of Syria the danger of any German intervention in the Middle East was removed, but the campaign led in time to a train of political wrangles between Britain and de Gaulle, who regarded himself and his Free French colleagues as the rightful trustees for Syria until France should be free. This was neither the first nor the last of the inter-Allied squabbles caused by de Gaulle's rigid insistence on what he claimed as his rightful due.

But before this small campaign was over, the world

had far more startling war news to absorb its attention. Germany had invaded Russia.

Stalin had not heeded Churchill's warning after Hess's flight to Britain. He still did not believe that Hitler would attack Russia. In fact, Hitler had always intended that the subjugation of Russia would be part of his triumphant World War.

It was, indeed, his main objective. He would have been content for Britain and France to go on living under his patronage, but he meant to annihilate Russia altogether. Germany needed more territory, more "living-space". That territory, in Hitler's view, could and would be found in the East. Russia must therefore be wiped out.

The German-Soviet pact of 1939 was intended only to keep Russia out of the way until the rest of Europe was conquered. Unfortunately for Hitler, but fortunately for the world, the rest of Europe had not been conquered. Britain was still holding out in 1941. In spite of this untimely Anglo-Saxon resistance he decided to carry out his Operation Barbarossa for the invasion of Russia and (as he said) the destruction of the Russian people in the interests of the German "master race".

Rumours that Germany was on the point of attacking Russia went round the world in the middle of June. Yet Hitler sent no ultimatum to Stalin. He preferred to strike without warning. He struck on June 22, 1941.

Britain heard the news in the early B.B.C. bulletins on a Sunday morning which (though the papers were not allowed to say so until a month afterwards) was the beginning of the hottest June day on record, with temperatures of 100 degrees in East Anglia and 91 in Regent Street, London. Though all British people had resented the German-Soviet pact of August, 1939, they were elated to know that Russia, in spite of herself, was now

in the war *against* the Germans. Britain was no longer alone. That Sunday night Churchill broadcast a pledge of British aid to Russia. His promise reflected the country's mood.

Perhaps we were over-generous. After all, we had no cause to be grateful to Stalin, who had refused to oppose Hitler in 1939 and had thus directly helped him to start the war. But in the middle of a fight for its life no country can reject an ally. Officially, Churchill broadcast that "we shall give whatever help we can to Russia and the Russian people. We shall appeal to all our friends and Allies in every part of the world to take this course and pursue it, as we shall, faithfully and steadfastly to the end." Unofficially he observed (or is said to have observed) that if Hitler invaded hell, he would at least make a favourable reference to the Devil in the House of Commons.

Hitler began his Russian campaign with high hopes. His military advisers thought it would all be over in four months, or perhaps even in three. It had taken the Russian armies a long time to beat Finland, and they could hardly be expected to hold out against Germany. Victory would bring glittering prizes. Apart from the elimination of the Soviet Army, Germany would gain big stores of grain and other foodstuffs, would control the rich agricultural areas of the Ukraine, and besides seizing Russia's own oil-wells would clear a way to the oil of the Middle East.

On that Sunday morning of June 22 Hitler began as usual with a land invasion and a heavy air bombardment behind the Russian lines. Germany had something like 3,000,000 men in action or in reserve on the Russian front. Russia began with about 2,000,000 men under arms, but had probably built her numbers up to 4,000,000 by the end of the year.

The German attack had three prongs. In the north General von Leeb's armies moved from East Prussia towards Vilna and Leningrad, while German-Finnish forces crossed the Finnish-Russian frontier and made for Viipuri. (Finland, which Britain had thought of defending in 1940, was now in the war on Germany's side.) In the centre General von Bock advanced on a broad front towards Minsk, Smolensk and Moscow. In the south General von Rundstedt, with the help of Hungarian and Rumanian troops, made Kiev and the Ukraine his principal objectives.

Their advances were swift and successful. The central area, with the final goal of Moscow, was the one which attracted most attention. It was also the one in which the Germans had some of their most sensational victories. By the end of June they claimed that their tanks had gone beyond Minsk. They reached Smolensk by July 14. In the south von Rundstedt drew near to Kiev. August came, and the Germans were still advancing all along the line.

Britain's forecast of the probable outcome of the Russian campaign had not been very different from Hitler's. Our own experts gave the Russians a hundred days before Moscow would fall. Yet when half of these hundred days were passed, it was noted that Russia, though falling back all the time, had still the spirit and power to mount counter-attacks against the invaders.

This was a *Blitzkrieg* with a difference. If Russia was not holding it up, she was at least slowing down its pace. In these perilous early weeks Russia signed a pact with Britain pledging the two countries to support each other in every way and not to make a separate peace.

Britain had other things to think about besides the new theatre of war. In July Wavell was moved from the Middle East Command, where he had had great

triumphs and heart-breaking reverses, to India. General Auchinleck, who had been Commander-in-Chief, India, changed places with Wavell and became Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. A minor military appointment was that of pretty Mrs. Jean Knox, aged 33, as Director of the A.T.S.—the Auxiliary Territorial Service today known as the Women's Royal Army Corps. By way of light and charming relief Britain heard at this time of a concert given at an unnamed place, where Princess Elizabeth (then aged 15) and Princess Margaret (then aged 10) sang, danced and played the piano for a soldier audience to raise funds for their knitting circle. A sum of £80 was collected during the interval.

This was the summer in which the broadcaster who called himself "Colonel Britton" (and was later known to be Douglas Ritchie) launched the V-campaign to encourage resistance in occupied countries of Europe. Patriotic Europeans painted or chalked up V signs (for Allied victory) in their towns and villages; the Morse code sounds for V—dot, dot, dot, dash—were surreptitiously tapped out by Allied sympathisers under the very noses of German guards. Churchill himself helped to make the movement popular by frequently holding up two fingers of one hand to represent the letter V.

The V-campaign was wonderful Allied propaganda, and even the ingenious Goebbels did not know how to counter it. The best he could do was to say that the letter V, when chalked up in occupied countries, stood for the German phrase, *Viktoria an allen Fronten* (Victory on all fronts) and so indicated occupied Europe's firm faith in German victory.

At this time B.B.C. overseas transmissions, including "Colonel Britton's" rousing talks in the V-campaign, were being sent out in 25 separate languages and occupied 25½ hours of broadcasting time every day. For a

short while radio was enlivened by experiments in "ghost voice" technique, by which one country's commentators would skilfully intervene in actual broadcasts from enemy countries. For example, when a B.B.C. announcer was reading the news and observed that "Two German raiders were destroyed" a German "ghost voice" would cut into the bulletin with a crisp "Rot!" When the announcer went on to say that "our own casualties were light", the "ghost voice" would warningly add: "You wait till next time!"

We were certainly "waiting till next time", for in spite of the fact that Germany was deep in her Russian war, Britain had no reason to believe that she herself was safe from invasion. July ended with Churchill's stern reminder that the invasion season was now at hand. All armed Forces were ordered to be "at concert pitch" by September 11.

Though the Soviet armies were still intact after six weeks of war the Germans were gaining ground all the time. In the north they captured Novgorod and cut the Leningrad-Moscow railway. In the centre von Bock still pressed on towards Moscow, and further south von Rundstedt was advancing into the Ukraine. The front line stretched from Murmansk to the Crimea.

Where would the war spread next? It was an ominous sign that the weak Vichy Government of France had allowed Japan to set up bases in Indo-China. This seemed to imply a threat to Thailand (Siam), and both Britain and the United States promised to help the Thailanders if Japan attacked them. Churchill openly warned Japan to stop her threats to Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines. Singapore itself was reinforced by detachments of British and Indian troops, R.A.F., naval ratings and Royal Marines.

On August 14 a broadcast by Attlee, who was

Deputy Prime Minister, told the world that Churchill and Roosevelt had met in mid-Atlantic and signed a document to be known as the Atlantic Charter. Some of the points in this joint Anglo-American declaration were that Britain and the United States sought no aggrandisement, that there should be no territorial changes that did not accord with the will of the peoples concerned, that all peoples have the right to choose their own form of government, and that the Nazi tyranny must be destroyed to ensure a peace which would give to all nations the means of dwelling in safety. Though the United States was still only a benevolent neutral and a most helpful supplier of material aid to Britain, the Atlantic Charter showed that she shared Britain's war and peace aims and was equally determined that Hitler must be defeated.

A brief military action in Iran was a diversion from the main struggle in Eastern Europe. British and Soviet troops moved into Iran from three points to make the Persian oil-fields secure against possible German attack. The Shah abdicated, and in September Britain and Russia temporarily occupied the country.

In September, too, a joint force of British, Canadians and Norwegians raided the main island of Spitzbergen, the Arctic archipelago 360 miles north of Norway, to forestall German occupation and seizure of its valuable coal supplies. The Allied raiders wrecked the coal mines, and brought the miners and their families back to Britain.

These were trifling incidents when compared with the great Russo-German conflict. For the first time the Germans were being held up. It had taken them 30 days to complete their capture of the Smolensk area, and even then they had secured only the charred ruins of the city. Here, as elsewhere, the Russians were pur-

suing their "scorched earth" policy of destroying stores, buildings and public works installations before they retreated. Yet Leningrad was now encircled, and on September 2 the Germans claimed that they were within fifteen miles of the city. Three weeks later they occupied Kiev, and in October Hitler announced that there would be a final drive on Moscow to end the Russian war. "The enemy," he said, "is already beaten, and will never lift his head again."

Yet the war was not going quite as Hitler had hoped. If Russia was dead, she was taking a long time to lie down. For the Leningrad defenders were actually counter-attacking: the Soviet general Voroshilov advanced six miles and recaptured two villages. Elsewhere the Germans still seemed to be doing well. By mid-October they had taken Odessa, Taganrog, Stalino and Kharkov, while the threat to Moscow was so grave that a state of siege was declared there. On October 24 the German advance guards were only 37 miles from Moscow itself.

In spite of all these successes the German attack had clearly slowed down. Russia, who was now receiving supplies from Britain, was actually holding up Hitler's hitherto invincible armies.

On some parts of the front the last month of 1941 saw the extreme limit of Germany's eastward advance. Her forces had gone a long way in six months—so far, in fact, that the long lines of communication were proving hard to keep up in the harsh conditions of Russian winter. But though they had gone a long way, Leningrad and Moscow were still undefeated. For the first time in the war a German *Blitzkrieg* had not achieved its objectives.

Hitler, who had little faith in his generals apart from Rommel and one or two other favourites, blamed the

High Command for the hold-up. Von Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief, offered his resignation on December 7, and after ten days' hesitation Hitler accepted it. He then announced that he would personally assume command of the German armies in the field.

Hitler was well versed in military matters. His intuitive grasp of the strategic situation had helped his generals to win the Battle of France. But nothing in his previous life had fitted him to command vast armies on a huge battlefield.

The Germans were harassed also by growing signs of resistance in occupied Europe. Demonstrations, sabotage and the assassination of Nazis occurred in many countries. The German Commander-in-Chief in Holland issued the grim warning that " all persons who greet enemy planes by waving hands or by other means will be shot at sight ". Fifty French hostages were shot at Nantes as a reprisal for the murder of one Nazi officer. There was a crisis in Czechoslovakia, and Heydrich, the Nazi governor, arrested General Elias, president of the " protectorate ", and ordered 26 Czechs to be shot. Even such harsh reprisals could not check the steady growth of European resistance to Hitler.

In Britain at this time A.R.P. had been officially renamed Civil Defence, and the industrial conscription of women was virtually imposed by the Registration of Employment Order introduced by Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour, on September 1. A few weeks later full conscription for industrial work or Service duties was ordered for all single girls between 20 and 30 years of age, and all men between 18 and 60 who had not been called up for National Service or industrial duties had to register as fire guards.

A new " Dig for Victory " drive was launched by R. S. Hudson, Minister of Agriculture, to encourage every-

one to grow more food, and it was stated that the number of new allotments dug during the first eighteen months of the war was 50 per cent. higher than the total number dug during the First World War. Britain was certainly digging for victory, but there were many scarcities. Onions, for instance, were rationed at one allocation of 2 lb. per head for the whole of the winter, and a points system of rationing was introduced for tinned fish and fruit, biscuits, jam and many other foods not previously included in the rationing scheme. Because of the meat shortage some shops were licensed to sell horseflesh guaranteed to be fit for human consumption.

Cafés were now forbidden to serve pots of tea: only cups were allowed. Wrapping paper could no longer be used for purchases made in shops, and shoppers had to put their purchases in their bags or carry them home unwrapped. Long-distance trains became fewer and fewer, and soon all these trains were as crowded as a Christmas Eve or Bank Holiday train is in peace-time. An unforgettable war-time memory is of corridor trains with people standing in every available square foot of space, much of the room being taken up by soldiers going on leave with large quantities of bulky kit.

Though Churchill's date for the opening of the 1941 "invasion season" had passed without incident, even at the end of October Lord Woolton, the Food Minister, was announcing new plans for the allocation and distribution of food if Hitler invaded Britain. But already it was being suggested that Britain herself should invade the continent of Europe, so as to relax the German pressure on Russia.

The idea was quite impracticable. Britain, even with Commonwealth aid, had nothing like the armed strength needed for the invasion of occupied Europe

Yet in October a meeting of shop stewards in London called on the Government to open a Western Front against Hitler.

This was the beginning of a long and generally ill-informed agitation for what came to be known as a "Second Front". Stalin himself gave a lead to Second-Front propaganda. He was not content with direct British aid and a Lease-Lend loan of £250,000,000 from the United States. He solemnly said: "There can be no doubt that the appearance of a Second Front in Europe—and it must certainly appear in the immediate future—will very considerably lighten our position."

Stalin was wrong about the "immediate future". Much was to happen before the real Second Front was opened in Europe. The war was about to become a world war indeed.

Shortly before the opening of this new phase a famous British ship was lost in the Mediterranean. The aircraft-carrier *Ark Royal,* which "Lord Haw-Haw" had "sunk" so often in the early days of the war, was sunk at last after a torpedo attack on November 14, 1941. After the crew had been taken off, her captain, senior officers and engineering staff stayed on board, and for twelve hours did their utmost to bring the damaged carrier into Gibraltar. They were unsuccessful. The *Ark Royal* could not be saved. Her loss left a big gap in our Mediterranean naval defences.

CHAPTER XI

BOMBS ON PEARL HARBOUR

WHILE the German advance in Russia was losing its first impetus, the Commonwealth forces in the Western Desert of North Africa came into prominence once again. Auchinleck had now been in command for some months, and on November 20, 1941, he opened a new British offensive on a 130-mile front.

It was excellent news that Auchinleck had taken the initiative against the formidable Rommel. Churchill sent a cheerful message to Cairo, expressing his hope that "the Desert Army may add a page to history which will rank with Blenheim and Waterloo". For some weeks his hope seemed to be justified.

Early *communiqués* said that British tanks had trapped the *Afrika Korps*, and that half Rommel's armour had been wiped out. The Tobruk garrison, which had been penned in its fortress since April, broke out at last, fought its way through the Germans and rejoined the main army. The Scots who had formed part of the garrison were played into battle by their pipe-major. It was now the Germans' turn to retreat in this desert war.

In Russia, too, the Germans were retreating from Rostov, where the Soviet Marshal Timoshenko was counter-attacking with great success. But just as the picture seemed brighter for Britain and Russia, a series of shattering bomb-explosions in the Pacific Ocean made a startling change in the whole war situation.

Ever since Japan had joined the German-Italian Axis, and had made it a triple instead of a dual alliance, the danger of her active intervention in the war had become more and more acute. She, like Germany, was a militaristic, acquisitive nation, with a big population which placed a heavy strain on her own resources. Her long-drawn-out war with China was a sign of her rulers' aggressive outlook, and it seemed likely that she would seize the opportunity of grabbing the rich and tempting spoils that lay before her in Asia and the Pacific.

In mid-October, 1941, the United States had recalled all her ships from the Far East, since it was then realised that Japan might attack without warning at any moment. On October 25 Colonel Knox, the U.S. Secretary for the Navy, said that a collision in the Far East was virtually inevitable. A fortnight later Churchill announced that, if the United States became involved in war with Japan, Britain herself would declare war on Japan "within the hour".

Yet no one could guess how or where Japan would strike, and the Japanese tried to lull suspicion by observing ordinary diplomatic procedures. In November Kurusu, Japan's special envoy in Washington, called on Roosevelt and discussed the Far Eastern situation for more than an hour. These discussions were resumed in December. In fact, the suave Japanese diplomats were in the middle of negotiations in Washington when seaborne Japanese aircraft, without warning or declaration of war, bombed the United States' naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, on December 7.

The bombs on Pearl Harbour shook the world. The circumstances of the attack, made at the very time when apparently peaceable talks were being held between Japan and the United States, justify Roosevelt's angry cry that December 7, 1941, was "a day that will live in

infamy ". But the harm was done. Japan had gained an immense initial advantage in the Pacific and Far Eastern war.

The blunders which the Americans made at Pearl Harbour seemed then, and seem now, to have been almost incredible. In view of the obvious threat from Japan, few would have thought it possible that Pearl Harbour could be taken by surprise. A fully effective air reconnaissance should have been maintained day and night, and the Japanese should never have been allowed even to approach the chief American naval base.

Two days later Roosevelt dismissed Admiral Kimmel, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, and two high-ranking generals; but their dismissal could not bring back America's lost battleships. For the Pearl Harbour losses were disastrous. The Japanese airmen, flying without regard for individual safety, sank nine American warships and put six others out of action. For the time being the United States could neither attack nor even defend herself in the Pacific.

Britain quickly honoured her pledge and joined the United States in war against Japan. In fact, she had no choice, for British colonies and possessions in the Far East were among Japan's immediate war objectives. Pearl Harbour was only the prelude to an immense series of land, sea and air operations. Within two days Japanese forces had moved into Thailand and Malaya, seized Shanghai, begun an attack on Hong Kong and landed in the Philippines. Japan's war aim was no less than complete mastery of Asia and the Pacific.

It was now Britain's turn to suffer a shattering naval loss. Two British battleships, the *Repulse* and the "virtually unsinkable" *Prince of Wales*, had been sent out to Malayan waters. There, as they sailed up the

Malayan coast to prevent Japanese landings, they were attacked by Japanese aircraft, and both were sunk. The news was published in Britain in the evening papers of Wednesday, December 11. All who read those grim headlines felt that this was one of the worst blows which Britain had suffered in any war.

Now the Second World War was fully joined. In support of his Japanese partner, Hitler declared war on the United States. A year earlier Britain and the Commonwealth had stood alone against Hitler and Mussolini, apart from the gallant but limited help given by the Free French and troops commanded by exiled European Governments. They were no longer alone. They had two powerful Allies, Russia and the United States. They had also a third and ruthless enemy.

Throughout December Japan advanced in many different theatres of war. She continued to attack Hong Kong, which fell on Christmas Day. Her forces moved irresistibly along the Malayan peninsula, capturing airfields on their way and drawing steadily nearer to Singapore. In the Pacific Japan occupied Guam and Wake Island, and poured troops into the Philippines, where General MacArthur, a former Chief of Staff of the United States Army, was in charge of the islands' defences. This was the first time that most British people had heard of MacArthur, who combined brilliant generalship with a somewhat flamboyant personality. His name was soon to become well known all over the world, and to remain so for years after the war.

In Britain the deepest anxiety was aroused by the threat to Singapore. Between the wars £60,000,000 had been spent on building a great naval base there, and on equipping it with powerful and presumably unassailable defences. It only gradually dawned on the British public that these defences were against attack from the

sea. The attack was now coming from the landward side, *behind* the base.

So 1941 ended with grim threats from the Far East, with more reassuring reports from Russia, where the German advance was definitely held up and the invading armies were having great transportation difficulties owing to the length of their supply lines, and with the most hopeful news of all from North Africa, where Rommel was still being driven back and was said to have lost 70,000 men. On Christmas Eve the Commonwealth forces re-entered Benghazi. They had conquered Libya again.

An amazing adventure in Libya at the year's end was a commando raid 250 miles behind the German lines with the object of capturing Rommel. It was led by Lieut.-Colonel Geoffrey Keyes, son of Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, who had spoken so forcibly in the Norwegian debate in the House of Commons. It was a gallant but unsuccessful exploit.

Keyes, who was awarded the Victoria Cross after his death, and his few comrades made their perilous way across the desert and reached the building they took to be Rommel's headquarters. Keyes had to shoot the sentry before he could get inside, and the alarm was given as soon as he entered the house. He emptied his revolver into the first room he came to, but was shot in the next and died a few minutes later. It turned out afterwards that the raiders had not found the right house.

The three major Allies were now drawing closer together. Churchill went to see Roosevelt in Washington shortly before Christmas. Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, conferred with Stalin in Moscow. One result of these meetings was the signing, early in 1942, of a pact affirming a Grand Alliance of the British

Commonwealth, the United States, Soviet Russia, China and 22 other nations. All pledged themselves to put all their resources into the fight and not to make any separate peace.

Life was still precarious in Britain. On New Year's Day, 1942, passengers in a train travelling to a south-eastern coastal resort had the unpleasant experience of being machine-gunned by a German Messerschmitt which came down to a height of less than 200 feet above the ground. A few days later shoppers were killed by bombs dropped in daylight on an east coast town. But the worst threats of food shortage were being averted by the enterprise of British farmers, who had already increased their arable land to 18,000,000 acres —50 per cent. more than the pre-war figure.

One of the biggest food problems was that of the "black market", as illicit trade in rationed or scarce foodstuffs was generally called. Offenders, whether racketeers or members of the public, were heavily punished when they were caught: in January a peer was fined £75 for getting twelve dozen eggs from a retailer with whom he was not registered. In March the maximum penalty for "black market" dealings was raised from two to fourteen years' penal servitude, but in spite of repeated exposures in the Press and Ministerial pledges to stamp out this illicit trading, it was never really checked throughout the war.

Early this year another item was added to the long list of rationed commodities. This was soap, which went "on the ration" on February 9. For a four-week period the allowance was four coupons, each of which could be used for the purchase of four ounces of hard soap, or three ounces of toilet soap, or three ounces of soap flakes or powder.

Both inside and outside the Services men and women

were doing all kinds of jobs to help win the war. A police corps section was added to the A.T.S.—the women's Auxiliary Territorial Service, and the girls in this new section wore the caps and "M.P." armlets of the Regular Army military police. A member of the A.T.S. police selection board said that the essential qualifications for this job were "plenty of commonsense and intelligence, *un-self-consciousness*—and a good figure"—the last qualification being needed because smart girls were expected to be more influential than frumpy ones in dealing with erring members of the A.T.S. These good-looking girls of the A.T.S. police soon became a familiar feature of war-time Britain.

Another familiar feature was soon to be added. Early in January Roosevelt decided to send over the advance guard of the American Expeditionary Force. Before the month was over newspaper headlines declared: "The Yanks are here again". The first detachment was stationed in Northern Ireland. They were part of the vast stream of "G.I.s" (general infantry soldiers) who were later to take up stations in many parts of Britain.

The New Year of 1942 began with a lull in North Africa, where Commonwealth troops were engaged in "mopping up" Axis garrisons left behind at Bardia, Sollum and Halfaya; but there was no lull in Russia or in the Far East.

The news from Russia was still satisfactory. Eden, on his return from Moscow, said there were four reasons why the German advance had been brought to a halt. These were the Russians' fighting retreat, which had worn down the invaders; the scorched earth policy; the harassing tactics of Soviet guerillas; and the rigour of the Russian winter. Yet though the threat to Moscow had been averted, and Russia was counter-attacking wherever possible, Germany held much of the grain

producing area of the Ukraine and was sternly besieging the great fortress of Sebastopol. No one could feel certain that Russia would not be overwhelmed by a new German drive.

Japan was the biggest menace at this stage of the war. She was making full use of the opportunity presented by her crippling of the United States Fleet at Pearl Harbour and her destruction of Britain's two great battleships. Her parachute troops invaded the Dutch East Indies. Her land forces moved into southern Burma. She continued her steady advance in Malaya.

January 13 brought news of the fall of Kuala Lumpur. Two days later the Japanese claimed to be within 120 miles of Singapore. A week passed, and a fierce battle was raging only 70 miles north of the base. Britain waited anxiously for the final struggle.

Early in February the Japanese prepared for the assault. By February 10 they had gained a foothold on Singapore island. On the next day they were pouring their troops into Singapore itself and closing in on the city. Then they captured the reservoirs which supplied the city, and so cut off all fresh water supplies from the garrison and the inhabitants. That was the end. On February 15 the commander of the garrison agreed to unconditional surrender. Singapore, our Far Eastern stronghold, had fallen to Japan.

At this hour of disaster Churchill appealed to the nation: "Let us move forward steadfastly into and through the storm." The storm had broken indeed. Britain was shocked by the fall of this supposedly impregnable citadel, and the whole Singapore defence scheme was harshly criticised. It was pointed out that, so long as Britain had command of the sea, the seaward defences would not have been needed, and that the £60,000,000 spent on the base should have been used

to provide security against attack from any possible quarter.

The surrender of 60,000 Commonwealth troops to a smaller Japanese force was deeply humiliating. In all our history no other British army of such a size had ever surrendered. Its eclipse left all Malaya securely in Japanese hands. For the rest of the war she had undisputed use of Malayan tin and rubber, which amount to about 40 per cent. of the total world supply. For the rest of the war the unlucky Singapore garrison had to endure the horrors of life in Japanese prison camps.

Bad news was coming from Africa, too. Rommel was making a successful counter-attack. Once again the Commonwealth forces left Benghazi before the advance of the *Afrika Korps*. By February 5 Rommel had recaptured Derna, and our troops were still in retreat. But there the German attack came to a halt. Rommel had suffered severely in the campaign before Christmas. He was now content to wait on a line extending from Gazala (on the Libyan coast) to Bir Hacheim until he had adequate reinforcements for a further eastward drive.

As though all these reverses were not enough, Britain had now to face another in the English Channel itself. For some months the German battleships, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, together with the cruiser, *Prinz Eugen*, had been refitting in Brest, where the R.A.F. frequently bombed them. From the British point of view it was most important that they should not be allowed to leave port and resume their activities as surface-raiders. A close watch was being kept on all three vessels.

Yet on a misty morning in February the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* slipped out of Brest and were well into the English Channel before the British air commands were warned of their escape. It was then

too late. The three warships were attacked with great courage by six Swordfish torpedo-bombers of the Fleet Air Arm, led by Lieut.-Commander Eugene Esmonde, who was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. He knew that his enterprise was desperate, but he and his fellow-pilots flew on against heavy odds and did their utmost to damage or destroy the warships.

Other British aircraft and warships followed up the attack. But the Germans had too long a start. Under (as it seemed to Britain) the very noses of Coastal Command and the Fleet Air Arm they successfully made their way to Kiel.

The one consoling aspect of this unfortunate story is that neither the *Scharnhorst* nor the *Gneisenau* did further damage to British merchant shipping. Both were heavily bombed in their new harbour by the R.A.F., and it was not until December, 1943, that the *Scharnhorst* put to sea again. She then attempted to attack a British convoy to Russia, but was trapped by the convoy's destroyer escort and sunk by the battleship, *Duke of York*, and the cruiser, *Jamaica*.

The *Gneisenau* never put to sea again during the war. Neither did the *Prinz Eugen*, which was subsequently taken over by the United States and used in the Bikini Atoll A-bomb experiment in 1946. Though she survived the actual explosions, she sank soon afterwards.

CHAPTER XII

WORLD-WIDE WAR

Spring of 1942 was a gloomy time for the Western Allies. The Americans were still in no position to play a dominant part in the war, though they were gradually putting their Navy in order after the shattering losses suffered at Pearl Harbour. In Russia the Germans were finding compensation on other fronts for their failure to take Moscow. They were still besieging Sebastopol; they were repelling counter-attacks on Kharkov in a battle which raged for week after week; and it was certain that they would intensify their attacks as soon as the bitter Russian winter ended and the finer weather came.

North Africa was again in one of those stalemate positions which alternated with the fierce campaigns that gave one or other side a temporary advantage, while the island of Malta was undergoing repeated German and Italian bombing attacks designed to put it out of action as an Allied naval base. But the island, first with the gallant but inadequate air support of three British fighter planes (known to the islanders as Faith, Hope and Charity), later with stronger air defences, held out bravely against the bombers. This "rough island story" was fittingly rewarded in April by King George VI, who gave Malta the George Cross. In doing so, he wrote: "To honour her brave people I award the George Cross to the island fortress of Malta, to bear witness to a heroism and devotion that will long be famous in history."

There was hope at least in the Mediterranean area. But when the Western world looked eastward there was no hope at all in the darkening scene. Japan was extending her conquests far beyond Hong Kong and Malaya, and in February and March her troops surged into Burma, where Britain had only comparatively small forces to man the defences. Soon they had captured Rangoon, in spite of plucky resistance by the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the Duke of Wellington's Regiment against overwhelming odds.

General Alexander, who had been the last man to leave Dunkirk and was regarded in military circles as one of the brightest stars of the high command, was sent out to the Burmese front, and for some time it was hoped that northern Burma might be held against the invaders. The hope was not fulfilled. Though Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese generalissimo, who had been waging war against the Japs since they had invaded his own country in 1937, sent a large army from the north to support the British and Indian defenders, even this reinforcement was not enough to save the situation. Burma was lost. On May 15 the British fighting retreat ended in complete evacuation.

This latest disaster had two brighter aspects. General Alexander's skilful handling of the retreat had allowed the bulk of the British and Indian forces to be safely withdrawn to India. Japanese hopes of seizing Burma's oil had been thwarted by prompt and thorough destruction of the oil-wells and installations.

The man who organised this destruction was W. E. Forster, whom Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, British Governor of Burma before the evacuation, hailed as "the greatest saboteur in history." Forster himself said modestly that he was "just a man who knew how to demolish oil-well machinery." Before the war he had

worked at a Rumanian oil-well, and he was sent to Burma to make plans for general destruction when the Japanese seemed certain to conquer the country. They were only 45 miles away from the oil districts when Forster began his sabotage, which demolished 600 oil-oil-wells and £20,000,000 worth of machinery. This "scorched earth" policy made it impossible for Japan to get any oil out of Burma for a long period, though unfortunately for the West they were soon able to draw on supplies from the Dutch East Indies, as well as from British Borneo and Sarawak, which they had occupied early in the year.

The Dutch East Indies campaign gave Japan another swift victory. Their first parachutists landed in Sumatra on February 14. By March 9 the Dutch had surrendered in Java, and the whole territory was in Japanese hands. Here, as in Burma, the defenders were much too weak to ward off strong Japanese forces, advancing with powerful air support.

Throughout these weeks the Americans and Filipinos were putting up a fierce resistance to the Japs in the Philippine Islands. These Pacific islands, though then under American control, had been promised independence by 1945, and the American General MacArthur had gone there before the Japanese aggression to organise defences on behalf of the Philippine Government. His forces consisted of some 19,000 American troops, 12,000 trained Philippine troops and about 100,000 other Filipinos, only half-trained and poorly armed.

The Japanese had landed on the Philippine island of Luzon three days after Pearl Harbour, and soon afterwards began a formidable attack on the American naval base of Manila. Though the city of Manila fell in January MacArthur's forces held out in the Bataan peninsula and on the strongly fortified island of Corre-

gidor. The odds were against them all the time, but Bataan kept up resistance till April 8 and Corregidor was not taken until May 6.

MacArthur had left before the Philippines fell: it would have been a great loss to Allied generalship if such an outstanding commander had been taken prisoner by the Japanese. With his wife and three-year-old son, who had been with him in the Philippines before the attack, he escaped to Australia, where he set up his headquarters as the Allies' Commander-in-Chief, South-West Pacific.

Further landings were made by the Japanese in New Britain, New Ireland, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, but their ambitious plan of seizing New Guinea and using it as a base for attacking Australia was frustrated both by Australian land resistance and by their naval defeats by the United States in the Coral Sea (in May) and off Midway Island (in June). In the Battle of the Coral Sea the Japanese and U.S. fleets attacked each other with shipborne aircraft; the Japanese lost three heavy cruisers, a light cruiser and an aircraft-carrier, while the Americans lost only an aircraft-carrier. In the Midway Island battle the Americans again showed their naval superiority over the Japanese. One U.S. aircraft-carrier was lost, but Japanese losses included four aircraft-carriers, two heavy cruisers and about a quarter of the invasion fleet which was being massed for an assault on Port Moresby, in New Guinea. These naval battles put new heart into the Allies after the months of bad news from the Far East. They showed that the U.S. fleet was getting into good shape again after the tragic prelude of Pearl Harbour.

Other cheerful news in this generally gloomy Spring was of the successful British commando raid on Bruneval, site of a German radar installation on the Normandy

coast about 12 miles north of Le Havre. This was a small-scale precursor of the big combined operations that came later in the war. All three Services took part in it. The assault party of 120 officers and men was carried in a dozen bomber planes, and two destroyers, four gunboats and an infantry landing ship stood by to take the troops home after the raid.

Parachutists of the new 1st Airborne Division were chosen to make the raid under the command of Major J. D. Frost. Air reconnaissance photographs had given them exact knowledge of the situation of the radar post, and when the parachutists landed they were able to make their way at once to the house where the radar specialists lived and the post itself was installed in the garden. Germans found in the house and at the radar post were shot or taken prisoner, and an expert radio engineer dismantled the equipment, which was loaded on to a collapsible trolley and taken away. The site itself was blown up, so that the Germans would not know we had actually taken their equipment away for examination in Britain.

Though German troops were firing from a near-by farm and the lights of vehicles could be seen moving along the road, the raiders regained the beach, where the apparatus, prisoners, wounded and the rest of the party were taken on board the landing craft. They were all safely transported to Britain without being attacked by sea or air.

The whole venture had been carried out with clockwork precision. We had not only gained valuable information about the latest German radar equipment, but had left a temporary gap in the French coast's radar defence screen. Three nights later planes from Bomber Command slipped through this gap and made a big raid on the Renault factory, near Paris, which was making

war material for Germany, and wrecked the whole works.

British parachutists were showing their practical value as raiders. At the end of March another raid, also a combined operation but without the use of parachutists, gave further proof of Britain's power to harry the Germans in western Europe, even though it was still far too early to think about full-scale invasion.

This was the daring assault on St. Nazaire, one of the two French ports on the Bay of Biscay which Germany used as naval bases for the Battle of the Atlantic. St. Nazaire was the only port on the French coast which was big enough to take the great German battleship, *Tirpitz,* then in harbour in Norway. British merchant ships would have been in grave danger if the *Tirpitz* had been transferred to the Biscay coast. It was therefore a prime object of British strategy to make St. Nazaire unusable for this menacing monster.

The port had a great dry dock known as the Forme Ecluse, which had been built in 1932 to berth the French liner, *Normandie*. The main objective of the St. Nazaire raid was to block this dock, if possible for as long as the war lasted. Minor objectives were special acts of sabotage intended to make the harbour less useful as a U-boat base.

To block the dock the raiding party made use of the *Campbeltown,* one of 50 American destroyers which the U.S. had handed over to Britain in 1940. The plan was to fill the *Campbeltown* with explosives and ram her into the dock gates, then to scuttle her and leave the explosives to be set off by delayed-action fuses some two-and-a-half hours later. At the same time a military force of 44 officers and 233 other ranks, under the command of Lieut.-Col. A. C. Newman, was to land in St. Nazaire and carry out the other acts of sabotage.

The naval force which took the raiding party consisted of the *Campbeltown*, 16 light motor launches, a motor gun-boat and a motor torpedo-boat, and was escorted by two destroyers. The whole flotilla put out from Falmouth on the afternoon of March 26, and reached St. Nazaire soon after midnight on March 27–28 without having been detected by German aircraft. But at 1.22 a.m., eight minutes before the *Campbeltown* was due to strike the gates, the alarm was given in St. Nazaire. Searchlights lit up the flotilla. Shore batteries opened a tremendous fire.

The defenders were too late. The *Campbeltown* sailed on, and wedged herself firmly into the centre of the main gate of the Forme Ecluse. There she was duly scuttled, when the men on board her had slipped ashore. The explosion did not, in fact, occur within the expected two-and-a-half hours. But the delay made it even more effective. During the morning, when the raid was over, a number of senior German officers and sightseers went to inspect the derelict ship. Some 60 officers and 320 men were on board when the *Campbeltown* blew up at 11 a.m. The damage was so great that the Forme Ecluse could not be used again during the war.

The commandos in the landing parties had varied fortunes. Some succeeded in carrying out their projected demolition work, but the plans for ordered withdrawal after the raid were wrecked by heavy German fire on the light and vulnerable motor-launches. Most of these were sunk in the river, and very few of the commandos were able to get away. Of the 277 who had sailed from Falmouth 59 were killed and 153 were taken prisoner, while the naval losses amounted to 85 killed and 106 captured. Though brilliantly successful in its main objective, the raid was costly and not particularly effective in other respects. But the raiders' bravery in per-

forming or trying to perform their allotted tasks makes St. Nazaire a memorable name in the history of British combined operations. Five of those who took part were awarded the Victoria Cross—Lieut.-Col. Newman, Commander Ryder (in charge of the naval forces) and Lieut.-Commander S. H. Beattie, who survived, and Able Seaman W. A. Savage and Sergeant T. Durrant, who were killed.

Apart from the overriding preoccupation of fighting the war, Britain now had a new political problem on her hands. The attack on Burma made it seem very likely that Japan would try for even bigger game and attempt the conquest of India, and her best hope of success lay in promoting disaffection among the Indians.

She had good hopes of being able to do so. At this time India was still a constituent part of the British Empire, though Britain had already passed legislation aimed at satisfying—in part, at any rate—Indian aspirations towards self-government. But the Indian nationalists who formed the large and influential Congress Party did not consider that this legislation went far enough or quickly enough. They wanted self-government and independence at once, and although they had no chance of getting either if Japan conquered their country there was a great danger that they would readily fall in with any "fifth column" activities that the Japanese might set in motion. ("Fifth column" was the name given to people within a country who actively supported its enemies. The Norwegian Quisling was one of the most shameless and notorious of all "fifth columnists". The phrase originated during the Spanish Civil War, when General Franco said that he had four columns marching on Madrid and a fifth column—of his own Nationalist supporters—already operating inside the city.)

This was a danger that Britain could not ignore. In

March, even before Burma had fallen, Churchill sent Sir Stafford Cripps to India with a new plan for future Indian self-government. The Cripps Mission, as it was called, was a failure. India was offered Dominion status after the war, but the Congress leaders were not content to wait so long—though in the end they had to do so. Cripps came home again with the problem still unsolved, and India remained a potential source of trouble and unrest in the East. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the Congress leaders' ingratitude and haggling over terms, the soldiers of the Indian Army fought splendidly on many fronts throughout the war.

The grim outlook of this Spring of 1942 was reflected in further austerity at home. In March the yearly number of clothing coupons was cut from 66 to 51, and in order to save labour and materials the Government ordered that men's suits must be made with fewer pockets and fewer buttons, and put a complete embargo on the supply of double-breasted jackets and turn-up trousers. A month later the Board of Trade turned its attention to men's shirts and pyjamas. It ruled that shirts must be shorter and must not have double cuffs, and that pyjamas must have neither pockets nor fancy trimmings.

Women's clothes also suffered from new restrictions. The Board of Trade prohibited the manufacture and sale of any underwear, pyjamas or nightdresses embellished with embroidery, appliqué work and lace of all kinds.

More food regulations came from Lord Woolton, Food Minister. Chocolate supplies were to be limited to slabs and filled bars. In April white bread was banned. This ban was designed to save shipping space. Wheat was one of the most bulky of our imports, and it was estimated that up to 500,000 tons of wheat would be

saved a year by the manufacture of wheatmeal loaves instead of pure white.

A Ministry of Information advertisement at this time gives a good idea of some of the ways in which war was affecting ordinary life in Britain. Under the heading "What do I do to go 'all out' for victory?" the Ministry gave these answers:

"I save everything I can for my local salvage campaign—paper, metal, bones, food scraps.

"I save gas, electricity, coal, paraffin and water.

"I save money wherever possible and put it into War Savings.

"I spend every ounce of energy and every minute I can spare in war-winning work. I help local voluntary organisations, and, if I can, I dig for victory.

"I know that everyone, including *myself*, can do something."

Everyone, indeed, could do something—not least the women of Britain. This Spring A.T.S. girls were allowed for the first time to volunteer to join searchlight crews on anti-aircraft gun sites. In April one of the first of these volunteers was killed in action. Her name was Nora Caveney, and she was killed by a bomb splinter on a South Coast gun site during a raid.

For the German bombing raids were still going on, though for the time being they had slightly changed in character. Germany's latest idea was to carry out what came to be known as "Baedeker raids". The targets were Britain's historic cities. Though they had no military importance, Bath, Canterbury and other famous cities suffered heavily from German attacks.

But Germany herself was now beginning to feel the full impact of the war on her own soil. On the night of May 31—June 1 Britain's Bomber Command made its first "four-figure raid" on Germany. More than 1,000

bombers attacked Cologne and dropped their bombs within an hour-and-a-half. They arrived over the target area at the rate of ten a minute.

Air Marshal A. T. Harris, chief of Bomber Command, sent a special message to all air crews shortly before the raid. "The force of which you form a part to-night," he said, "is at least twice the size and has more than four times the carrying capacity of the largest air force ever before concentrated on one objective . . . In your hands lies the means of destroying a major part of the resources by which the enemy's war effort is maintained . . . Let them have it—right on the chin!"

It was during this raid that Flying Officer Leslie Manser, of the R.A.F.V.R., showed the "most conspicuous bravery" for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross after his death. His plane was badly damaged, but though all its occupants could have escaped safely by parachute, Manser headed for home with the object of keeping both aircraft and crew out of enemy hands. The port engine went out of action. Part of one wing was burnt away. But Manser flew on until the moment came when a crash could be avoided no longer. Then at last he ordered the crew to bale out, but he himself waved away a parachute offered by a flight-sergeant, and told the sergeant to jump quickly as he could hold the plane steady for only a few moments more. It crashed and burst into flames while the crew—all except Manser—were floating to safety by parachute.

Cologne certainly took it "on the chin", and so did the Ruhr valley, where another 1,000-bomber raid was carried out two days later. Britain was showing how powerfully she could hit back, though there was much controversy at home over "Bomber" Harris's "four-figure raids". People wondered whether such large-scale attacks were really successful in hitting vital tar-

gets, and critics suggested that our air resources were not being used to the best advantage.

In spite of these signs of our growing strength in the air these were depressing months for Britain. Yet British people's hardships were of a very different kind from those being suffered by the inhabitants of German-occupied territories. Every month brought new reports of German savagery in these countries. In France the Vichy Government was still "collaborating" with its German masters. Laval had become Prime Minister with Pétain as Head of the State. But the patriotic Frenchmen of the resistance were waging guerilla war against the Nazis, and many French hostages were executed as German reprisals for these activities. In Holland 100 Dutchmen were shot on the charge of attempting to make contact with Germany's enemies. In Norway a whole village was wiped out because the deputy chief of the local German Gestapo had been shot dead.

The grimmest reign of terror was in Czechoslovakia. The assassination of Heydrich, the brutal German Governor of the Czech protectorate, was followed by mass executions in April and May. Himmler, the ruthless Gestapo chief, went to Prague himself to direct the slaughter.

The first Nazi order was that the entire families of persons suspected of being concerned in the attack on Heydrich should be exterminated. This was only the beginning. In all about 1,000 Czechs were executed in reprisal for Heydrich's murder. Worst of all was the fearful massacre at Lidice, where the Germans shot every man, sent all the women to concentration camps and removed the children to be given Nazi education elsewhere. The name of Lidice remains, and always will remain, an unforgettable symbol of Nazi barbarism.

CHAPTER XIII

END OF THE BEGINNING

CHURCHILL called the Battle of Alamein "the end of the beginning of the war". But, in fact, though years of bitter fighting lay ahead, Alamein was certainly the beginning of the end. It would be more exact to call the summer of 1942 "the end of the beginning".

These months in which Rommel drove the Eighth Army back to Egypt and von Bock pushed on irresistibly (as it then seemed) towards Stalingrad were the culminating period of Hitler's successes. It was in this July that Aneurin Bevan, M.P., accused Churchill of being "Maginot-minded" and bitterly gibed: "The Prime Minister wins debate after debate, but loses battle after battle." It was an indication of the low ebb of our fortunes that such a taunt could have been made at all.

In North Africa the Commonwealth and Axis armies had ended the winter campaigns on a line running inland from the coast-town of Gazala, which was still in British hands. At the end of May Rommel decided to launch a new offensive. Newspaper headlines announced that 18 miles of Panzers were swinging into action in Libya.

The Eighth Army, now under the command of General Neil Ritchie, had been intending to take the offensive itself early in June, but Ritchie was quite prepared for Rommel to move first. The strength and swiftness of Rommel's attack were too much for him.

The first onslaught by the *Afrika Korps* was directed

against the southern end of the line, not far from Bir Hacheim, which was held by a Free French garrison, under General Koenig. After days of fierce fighting Bir Hacheim fell, though Koenig was able to withdraw most of his men, and Rommel was free to concentrate his attack further north, where the Guards were defending a fortified post which Britain had given the name of Knightsbridge. The Battle of Knightsbridge was fierce and exhausting. The Guards resisted tremendous attacks until their armour was so weakened that they had to be withdrawn.

Once again the Eighth Army was being pushed back, but it was some consolation to British people at home to realise that Commonwealth troops still held Tobruk. That strong fortress, which had held out so long only a few months earlier, would surely be ready to withstand another siege and to become again a formidable thorn in the Germans' side.

This time the situation was different. In 1941 the Commonwealth defenders were holding a fortress well prepared to withstand a long siege. But we had not expected to fight there again. In the months which had passed since Tobruk was relieved its defensive system had fallen to some extent into neglect. It no longer presented a barrier that could be held indefinitely by brave men.

Both British and Axis forces lost heavily in a fierce battle fought at Acroma, but still Rommel's tanks were pressing forward, and still the Eighth Army was being driven back. Then came the sudden and unexpected climax. On June 18 Cairo messages said that Tobruk was ready to withstand another siege. But two days later, when further British withdrawals had left Tobruk isolated, Rommel launched a powerful bombing attack on the fortress, sent sappers ahead to clear the mine-

fields and make a lane for his tanks, and then drove both tanks and infantry through the weakened outer ring of defences.

Though the garrison consisted of 35,000 men, led by General Klopper, commanding the 2nd South African Division, it could not hold out when enemy tanks were actually in possession of a large part of the fortress. Klopper himself had no chance of effectively controlling the situation, because Rommel's *Stukas* (dive-bombers) had bombed him out of his headquarters and relentlessly pursued him from place to place. Organised resistance collapsed, and on June 21 Tobruk was in Rommel's hands. The garrison surrendered. Some 30,000 of the defenders were taken prisoner.

Only a few escaped capture in this disaster. Among them were a party of 200 Coldstream Guards, some Scots Guards and about 190 South Africans who set out in lorries under the leadership of a Coldstream officer, Major H. M. Sainthill. After making a wide sweep to the south they safely reached the Egyptian frontier 70 miles away.

To British people this was one of the greatest shocks of the war. But the worst part of it was hardly realised at the time, except by those in the nation's inner councils. It was not merely that Tobruk had surrendered, but it had surrendered to enemy forces vastly inferior in numbers to the defenders.

At that time hopes of opening a "second front" in Europe seemed very remote, though the more fervent friends of Russia were constantly urging the Prime Minister to throw an army over the Channel in order to relieve the pressure on the Eastern Front. Most clear-thinking people recognised that this would have been a suicidal attempt at such a time, but they were relieved to think that Egypt was still safe and that the Desert

Army was at least holding its own in the backwards-and-forwards campaign in Libya. Suddenly that confidence was shaken. The fall of Tobruk was a terrible blow. Surrender on such a scale painfully recalled the tragedy of Singapore only a few months earlier. In those two defeats alone 100,000 Commonwealth soldiers had been taken prisoner by the Axis. At this moment Hitler and his Axis allies seemed indeed on top of the world.

As Rommel continued to sweep on towards Egypt, Auchinleck, the Middle East Commander-in-Chief, superseded Ritchie in the command of the Eighth Army and himself directed the closing phase of the campaign. It was too late for him to turn defeat into victory. Yet he did, in fact, reorganise our defences so successfully that Rommel was brought to a halt at El Alamein, a well-fortified position near the Egyptian coast where the battle-front was restricted to a distance of about 35 miles between the sea and the Qattara Depression, which was impassable for vehicles.

It was the best recovery that could have been made at that time. Though Tobruk had fallen and Britain had suffered another humiliating reverse, the worst had not happened. Cairo, Alexandria and the Suez Canal were still safe. If we had lost these we could no longer have defended Malta or controlled the Mediterranean.

One of the soldier-heroes of this campaign was Private Herbert Wakenshaw, a former Newcastle newspaper-seller, pit-boy and labourer, who was awarded the Victoria Cross after his death for his bravery during the retreat to El Alamein. While he was manning an anti-tank gun south of Mersa Matruh his left arm was blown off by an enemy shell; but he crawled back to his gun and went on firing, thus allowing a whole British infantry company to withdraw in safety. He was wounded again and blown away from his gun. Yet he

once more dragged himself back and was preparing to fire again when a direct hit killed him and destroyed the gun.

In this mournful July of 1942 it seemed only too likely that Egypt would soon fall before the all-conquering Rommel. The world did not then know that Rommel was shortly to meet his match.

Early in August Churchill went to Egypt on his way to Moscow for his first meeting with Stalin. After considering the problems of high command in the Middle East he decided, as he said later, to " change the bowling" by transferring Auchinleck to another post and making new appointments both to the Middle East command and to the command of the Eighth Army.

General Alexander, the last man at Dunkirk and the brilliant organiser of the fighting retreat in Burma, was made Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. Churchill had intended to give the Eighth Army to General Gott, who had been a successful and inspiring corps commander during the desert campaigns. But Gott's aeroplane was shot down as he was flying back to Cairo from the front line, and he was killed by machine-gun bullets as he was trying to help his fellow-passengers out of the wrecked plane. In Gott's place Churchill appointed Lieut.-General B. L. Montgomery, who had been with Alexander during the Dunkirk evacuation and had subsequently commanded and trained an army corps in the south of England.

Montgomery's name was then little known outside military circles. But the British public soon learned that the new Eighth Army commander neither drank nor smoked, took no interest in personal comfort, and was a devotee of physical fitness both for himself and for everyone under his command. The fact that he was also a great general was to be revealed later.

Two months earlier an American general, hitherto virtually unknown outside his own country, had arrived in England to take command of the United States forces in the European theatre of war. This was Major-General Dwight D. Eisenhower. U.S. newspaper correspondents informed Britain that he was generally known as "Ike" —a nickname which had been given him at West Point, the U.S. Military Academy, and had stuck to him ever since.

So the famous team of "Alex" and "Monty" was brought into being in Egypt, and the first steps had been taken towards forming the equally famous team of "Ike" and "Monty" in Europe two years later. But the promise of these great names was still hidden from the Western world, which saw only defeat in North Africa and steady deterioration on the Russian front.

In the early months of the year Russia had regained some parts of her lost territory, but had still to defend a long and menacing battle-line, stretching from Leningrad to Taganrog on the Sea of Azov, with Orel, Kursk and Kharkov on the German side of the line. When Spring came Hitler gave orders for a new and devastating offensive in the East. Above all, he had made up his mind to capture the Russian oil districts of Maikop and Grozny in the Caucasus.

His battle plan was to capture Leningrad and hold the central part of the front, while von Bock, commanding the 100 divisions of the Southern Army Group, was to break through into the Caucasus and occupy the valuable oil regions. In the south, too, Manstein's Eleventh Army was given orders to take Sebastopol and turn the Russians out of the Crimea.

On May 12 the Soviet Marshal Timoshenko tried to forestall the German attack by himself making an offensive south of Kharkov. Though temporarily successful

he was soon forced to give way, and in June and July von Bock made big advances in the Kursk and Kharkov areas. At the same time the Russians fell back before Sebastopol, which was captured on July 1.

Though the final stage at Sebastopol took only a month, the Germans had reached the outer defence of the great fortress as far back as November, 1941. The Russians' tough resistance was a foretaste of what was soon to happen at Stalingrad. But that summer there was nothing to show either Russia or her allies that better days were ahead. Von Bock was moving triumphantly onwards. German armies streamed across the Don, drawing nearer every day to the important city of Stalingrad and the Caucasian oil towns. By mid-August von Bock had already seized the Maikop oilfield and the Krasnodar refinery. Though Leningrad had held out against the new offensive, German victory in the south seemed to be inevitable. It was beginning to look as though, in the popular war-time phrase, Russia had "had it."

Bad news from the battle-fronts was accompanied by more austerity on the British home front. A complete ban was placed on the manufacture of many articles, including cash registers, lawn mowers, certain types of jewellery and cutlery, leather trunks, haversacks and peep-toe shoes. Even sausages came under war-time control. Lord Woolton told sausage-makers that they must put not less than 30 per cent. and not more than 50 per cent. of meat into their products. On July 26 sweets and chocolate, which had been scarce for a long time, were put "on the ration". For the first ration period the quantity was fixed at two ounces a week for everyone. No distinction was made between adults and children.

Our vital need to save petrol was reflected in the con-

plete ban imposed on private motoring on August 1. Previously motorists had had a small ration. Now "joy-riding" was forbidden altogether, and cars could be used for essential purposes only. The police were authorised to examine motorists' petrol coupons and to check the contents of their tanks.

Yet Britain was getting on well with the task of feeding herself. Already British farmers were growing two-thirds of the food eaten in Britain, and they were looking forward to the biggest harvest in British history. Some prisoners of war were now working on the land. This summer a farmer's daughter was fined £3 for having written a love-letter to an Italian prisoner.

The bombing war was still in full swing. Air Marshal Harris declared: "We are going to scourge Germany from end to end." The British newspapers which published his warning also carried the news that Birmingham had just had its worst raid of the war since April, 1941. In August a German bomb hit an East Anglian hospital and killed many of the patients.

India was again proving troublesome. Since the failure of the Cripps Mission the nationalist Congress Party had demanded complete independence and had called on Britain to "quit India". It had also adopted an aggressive policy of sabotage. With the Japanese armies on India's borders such wrecking tactics could not be tolerated. In August Mr. Gandhi, the Congress leader, Mr. Nehru, his right-hand man, and other prominent Congress members were arrested and interned. Months of rioting and unrest followed their arrest.

One of the most controversial operations of the whole war took place on August 18 and 19, 1942. This was the Combined Operations raid on Dieppe, where the Canadian Army supplied the bulk of the land forces.

Goebbels told Germany that the Dieppe raid was an

invasion attempt which had failed. That was typical Nazi propaganda. The Dieppe raid was never intended to be anything more than a "reconnaissance in force". It has been criticised as useless slaughter. But it can also be said that it gave the Allies valuable information. It proved, for one thing, that any hope of invading Europe by capturing a great port was an illusion. When the Allies really invaded France they made no attempt to begin by seizing a port like Dieppe.

The total force which took part in the raid consisted of 6,100 troops of all ranks (of whom 4,693 were Canadians), 252 naval ships and landing-craft and 69 air squadrons. Eight separate landings were planned, and the objectives included the blowing-up of a gasworks and an attack on the German divisional headquarters.

Varying fortune attended the different landings, but only the No. 4 Commando, led by Lord Lovat and Major Mills-Roberts, achieved any outstanding success. These raiders gallantly attacked and destroyed a German coastal battery half-a-mile inland from the small holiday resort of Varengeville. The unluckiest troops were those which landed at Puits, where they were exposed to withering fire as soon as they left their landing-craft. These were men of the Royal Regiment of Canada. Out of 26 officers and 528 other ranks in this landing party all the officers and 496 other ranks became casualties. Only two officers and 65 other ranks, half of whom were wounded, returned to England.

The raid as a whole was costly and very few of the hoped-for objectives were reached. Out of the 6,100 troops taking part in it 3,648 were killed, wounded, missing or taken prisoner; the Navy lost 81 officers and 469 other ranks; and the R.A.F. lost 98 fighters and eight other aircraft.

It seemed to some people both then and later that

this was a futile sacrifice at the altar of Combined Operations. But the Normandy landings two years later are an answer to those who condemn Dieppe. It may have been foolhardy to fling a few thousand troops into a great port firmly held by the Germans. Yet the value of the lessons learned at Dieppe was surely proved by the smoothness of the D-Day operations.

CHAPTER XIV

ALAMEIN—STALINGRAD

SUMMER of 1942 drew to an end with few signs of comfort for Britain. Certainly British farmers had harvested record wheat crops, the R.A.F. was dropping enormous bombs weighing 3½ tons each on Germany, and U.S. aircraft based in Britain were beginning to join in the Continental air raids. The largest Allied convoy ever sent to Russia had survived four days' non-stop attack by masses of torpedo planes and bombers and packs of U-boats, thanks to the skill and daring of the destroyer escort which guarded it. But all the time von Bock's armies were drawing nearer to Stalingrad and Rommel was awaiting his opportunity for a final assault on Egypt.

The Stalingrad saga moved on dramatically from week to week. In August von Bock had thrown his tanks across the Don. Soon he was only 30 miles from Stalingrad. Then the German ring was said to be tightening round the city. In September the battle was raging in the outskirts. Later that month the Germans were actually inside Stalingrad, and in one sector they had occupied two streets.

Yet the Russians were holding out. They had resolved to "make every house a fortress" and they were doing so most effectively. How long could such improvised defences hold back the full might of Hitler's tremendous armies? It seemed that it could be only a matter of days before Stalingrad was bound to fall.

It was unfortunate that at this stage of the war Russia made an unfair attack on the good faith of her Western Allies. In an interview with an American journalist in Moscow, reported in Britain on October 5, Stalin declared: "As compared with the aid which the Soviet Union is giving to the Allies by drawing upon it the main force of the German Fascist armies, the aid of the Allies to the Soviet Union has been little effective. In order to amplify and improve this aid, only one thing is required: that the Allies fulfil their obligations fully and in time. The possibility of a Second Front is of first-rate importance in Soviet estimates of the current situation."

The implied suggestion that the Allies were not fulfilling their obligations to Russia must have been particularly galling to those British seamen who had just fought U-boats and Nazi bombers for four days to take a convoy to a Russian port; but Stalin never showed much real gratitude to the Allied merchant seamen and their naval escorts who faced the rigorous weather and intense strain of the Arctic convoy route. On the contrary, he usually groused about the convoys, and said there ought to be more of them.

Yet this perilous Arctic route was kept open from the Autumn of 1941 to April, 1945, except for a long summer break in 1943 and a shorter one in 1944, when experience had shown that danger was too great in the almost continuous Arctic daylight. Many of our convoys had to face ferocious German attacks by battleships, cruisers, destroyers, U-boats and aircraft. One which set out at the end of June, 1942, met a particularly heavy submarine attack when it was too far from the Home Fleet's base to receive any help from cruisers or battleships; and 24 out of 35 ships were destroyed. Yet the gallantry and tactical skill of the escorts and the

pluck of the merchant seamen defied all the Germans' efforts to close the route. Through fog and gale, through ice and snow, assailed by bombs from the air and torpedoes and shells from the sea, the men of the Arctic convoys sailed on to help Russia. By the end of the war the route was going so smoothly that only two ships out of 252 were lost in the final convoy season, which lasted from August, 1944, to April, 1945.

Instead of being grateful for all this Allied assistance Stalin continued to harp on the need for a Second Front, which was now becoming a Soviet theme-song. In fact, when he gave his interview to the American journalist he knew very well that the Western Allies were on the point of opening another front; for at their Moscow meeting in August Churchill had told him of a proposed landing in French North Africa, which British and American planners called by the code-name of Operation Torch. All Britain admired the Soviet defence of Stalingrad, but we were not prepared to accept Stalin's implication that Russia alone was fighting the war against Hitler.

By this time 45,000 Germans were actually in the streets of Stalingrad, but in this astonishing battle they were advancing only a few yards at a time. Half-way through October the Russian defenders suddenly seemed to regain the initiative. They recaptured strategic heights north-west of the city, and from Moscow (not from Berlin) came the announcement that "the decisive phase" had begun. As the German attack weakened, outside help was already on the way to the besieged city. To the north-west, between the Don and the Volga, Timoshenko's relief offensive was daily gaining ground.

October, 1942, was the turning-point of the war. While the legend of German invincibility was being

shattered in the streets of Stalingrad, Alexander and Montgomery were preparing to reap in Africa the reward of their careful planning and rigorous training and of the greater supplies of men and armour that were now reaching the African theatre of war.

So far, the Eighth Army had had its ups and downs in the desert war; but it had fought stubbornly and well under its successive commanders, and in spite of the limitations due to lack of supplies it was already a great army when Montgomery took it over. Under his leadership it was soon to take its place as a peerless fighting force and to be generally recognised as one of the most notable armies in world history.

Alexander had inherited from Auchinleck the front line running inland from El Alamein, on the Mediterranean coast, to the Qattara Depression. For a fortnight in October there was great air activity on this front. British bombers attacked Rommel's airfields, minefields, ammunition dumps, bases and lines of communication. This air bombardment ended on October 23, and that same evening 1,000 British guns put up a tremendous artillery barrage on a six-mile sector of the desert front. At 10 p.m. the infantry began to move forward. The Battle of Alamein had begun.

The plan of battle provided for an advance by the XXXth Corps (under General Leese) in the northern sector of the front, with the object of making two lanes through the minefields. The Xth Corps (under General Lumsden) would then follow along these lanes and engage Rommel's tanks. In the south the XIIIth Corps (under General Horrocks) was to make a feint attack in order to keep a substantial part of the enemy forces far away from the main field of battle. Before the battle began Montgomery issued an Order of the Day, enjoining his men to "destroy Rommel and his army".

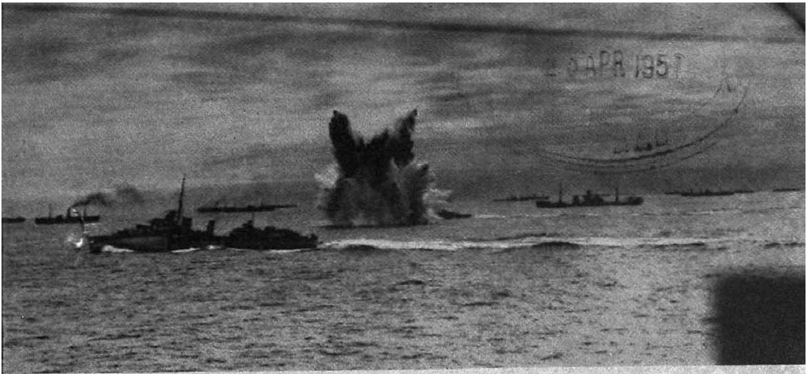
Montgomery had hoped that his first attacks would make the desired gap in Rommel's line, but days of hard fighting were to pass before the gap was actually made. At last, at 1 p.m. on November 2, a subsidiary operation which was given the code-name of "Supercharge" was begun by the 2nd New Zealand Division, the 151st and 152nd British Infantry Brigades and the 9th British Armoured Brigade. The infantry broke through on a 4,000-yard front, the final German minefield was reached, and a corridor was made for the British tanks to pass through.

Rommel at once counter-attacked, but more British tanks were thrown into the battle and drove the Germans back. The decisive stroke had been made. That night Rommel knew that he was beaten and began to withdraw what was left of his battered army.

Now the way was open for the last and greatest Commonwealth advance across the Western Desert. The first reports told triumphantly of 270 German guns and 260 tanks destroyed and of 9,000 prisoners taken. That was only the beginning.

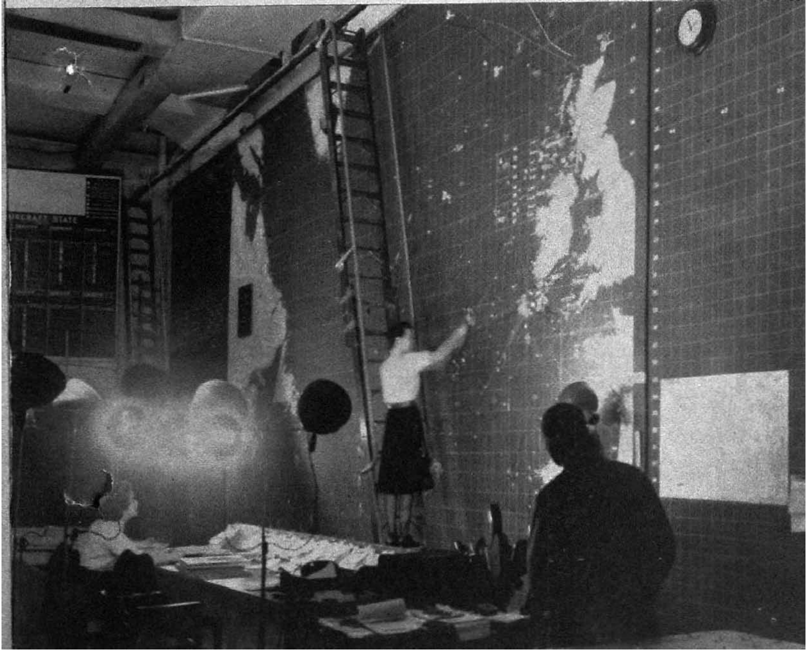
For the first time in the war a Commonwealth army had both superiority in numbers and a balanced equipment in all kinds of armament. It had also high morale and brilliant leadership both in the field and at Alexander's Middle East headquarters. The great victory of El Alamein was won. Montgomery and the Eighth Army were the heroes of the hour. They had clearly proved that there was no question of German invincibility when Allied armies met their enemies with the right equipment and in the right numbers.

As the German retreat in Libya seemed to be turning into a rout the Western world was thrilled to hear that another Allied attack had begun on the other side of North Africa. This was Operation Torch. It began on



5. (*Top*) A convoy to Russia under attack, September 1942.

(*Bottom*) The Operations Room in Derby House, Liverpool, the nerve centre of the Battle of the Atlantic.



6. (*Top*) An Advanced Dressing Station during the El Alamein battle.

(*Bottom*) Commando troops going ashore, D-day, 6th June 1944.

November 8, when British and American forces made a series of landings at various points on the North African coast east and west of Algiers.

Operation Torch had an interesting history. When American troops came to Britain in the Spring of 1942 it was at first uncertain whether they would be used for an invasion of North Africa or reserved for the later opening of the much-debated Second Front in Europe. After long discussion between Britain and the United States the North African project was agreed upon, but it was quickly realised that the plan involved political as well as military difficulties.

French Morocco and Algeria, where the proposed landings were to take place, had refused to throw in their lot with General de Gaulle and the Free French. They had remained loyal to the Vichy Government which had "collaborated" with Germany ever since the fall of France. It was hoped that the French in these countries would now welcome the opportunity of escaping from "collaboration" and lining up with the Western Allies. But it was obviously important to avoid having to fight the French in North Africa before tackling the Germans from another front.

Eisenhower had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of Operation Torch, with another American, General Mark Clark, as his deputy. As the planning went on, it was realised that the best way of avoiding an open clash with the French was to find an outstanding Frenchman who could win over French North Africa to the Allied side.

De Gaulle was not the man for this particular purpose, since at that time he would not have been acceptable to Frenchmen who had so far supported the Vichy Government. A more likely candidate was General Giraud, a remarkable character who had the distinction

of having been taken prisoner by the Germans in both the First and Second World Wars and of having escaped on each occasion. He was then in France, but he was thought to be sympathetic to the Allied cause. American envoys opened secret conversations with him and arranged for him to be taken in a British submarine to Gibraltar, in readiness for the invasion.

It was still necessary to make direct contact with the French in North Africa, so as to give the invasion every chance of a peaceful beginning. Robert Murphy, an official of the U.S. State Department (the equivalent of the British Foreign Office) was able to go to Algeria, since the United States was still in diplomatic contact with the Vichy Government. He reported that the French Commander-in-Chief in Algeria, General Mast, would like to confer with an American military delegation before the landings took place. Murphy hinted also that Admiral Darlan, who was one of the strongest men in Pétain's Vichy Government and was cordially detested in Britain, might be ready to come over to the Allied side if he could be assured that the invasion of North Africa would be on a scale that would guarantee success.

Murphy's cable gave the exact time and place for a secret rendezvous on the North African coast. General Clark decided to go himself. So on October 19, with four colleagues, he flew to Gibraltar and there embarked in a British submarine which was to take him to Africa.

It was a long and slow journey, partly on the surface and partly under water, but at last they reached the appointed place, and went ashore in small boats from the submarine at dead of night. Murphy and some of his French associates were waiting for them on the beach. Murphy said: " Welcome to North Africa." Clark had intended to make an impressive speech in French,

but all he really said was: "I'm damn glad we made it."

The discussions were very successful. General Mast arrived in the early morning and said he was sure that he and Giraud could keep the French troops from resisting the invasion, though he could not answer for the French Navy. The conference had to be broken off abruptly in the afternoon because the local police suspected that something odd was going on, and Clark and his colleagues hid in a wine-cellar while the police questioned their hosts.

When they set out to return to the submarine the waves were too high for their small boats to be safely launched, and it was not until 4 a.m.—twenty-eight hours after they had landed—that they were able to put the boats to sea and reach the submarine. A farcical feature of this curious "cloak and dagger" episode was that Clark, who had stripped to his shorts and shirt while trying to launch his boat, lost his trousers when it overturned.

So the stage was set for the opening of a new front in Africa. It was a joint Anglo-American venture, though more American than British troops were engaged in it. The First Army, under the British General Anderson, included both British and American troops. Other American forces, under General George S. Patton, sailed direct to North Africa from the United States.

On November 8 the landings took place at Algiers, Oran and Casablanca, and although some of the local French commanders resisted the invasion this regrettable fighting was all over in a few days. Rather surprisingly the final order of French surrender by both Army and Navy came from Admiral Darlan himself, who happened to be in Algiers because his son was in hospital there, suffering from poliomyelitis.

The Axis forces in North Africa were now caught be-

tween two armies. As the vanguard of the Eighth Army drove Rommel back through Libya, Roosevelt confidently announced that the U.S. and British forces in the west would march to Tripoli. It seemed only a matter of time before the two armies would meet.

In Britain church bells rang for the first time in three years to celebrate the victory of Alamein. Their cheerful noise reflected the nation's joy and excitement as Allied armies advanced on either side of Africa.

One day brought news that the Eighth Army had re-entered Tobruk and that the First Army had crossed the border into Tunisia. Then for a short time attention was diverted from the military to the political front. Eisenhower and Clark, who were anxious to secure the utmost possible French support, agreed with Darlan that he should hold supreme French authority in North Africa. This was a practicable solution of a difficult problem, but it was vehemently criticised both in Britain and in the U.S. by those who thought that the Allies should have nothing to do with former French "collaborators", even if they were now willing to change sides.

The kind of argument which raged over the "deal with Darlan" was to be heard again in 1943, when Italy surrendered and the Allies found it expedient to negotiate with General Badoglio. In both cases expediency was justified by the results. In fact Admiral Darlan's régime did not last long. He was assassinated on Christmas Eve by a young Frenchman, and the way was clear for Giraud to take over the French administration.

In the meantime Hitler had planned a reprisal for this Allied landing on French territory. This was to be the seizure of the major part of the French Fleet, which had been in harbour at Toulon since the fall of France. It is to France's honour that she never gave her Fleet to the

Germans. Before Hitler could carry out his plan of seizing the ships at Toulon Admiral Laborde, Commander-in-Chief of the French Mediterranean Fleet, scuttled them all. There were 73 of them, including a battleship, two battle-cruisers, seven other cruisers, 29 destroyers and 16 submarines.

In spite of the political settlement, events in North Africa did not move as quickly as Britain had hoped. At the end of November British paratroops captured an Axis aerodrome near Tunis. Rommel's *Afrika Korps* was still being chased by the Eighth Army. But the Germans now had strong forces in Tunisia and were able to resist the Allied advance from the west. The year closed with a considerable section of North Africa still in Axis hands.

While the new Africa campaign was getting under way, the Battle of Stalingrad was ending with dazzling triumph for Russia. Early in November the German attack had definitely weakened and died down. Soviet counter-attacks gained ground both north and south of the city and isolated Marshal von Paulus's Sixth Army which had been ordered to make the final German onslaught. Von Paulus could probably have escaped if he had wished or dared to do so, but for months past Hitler had been announcing that Stalingrad was doomed. A German retreat at this point would have been a staggering blow to Axis prestige.

Von Paulus stayed where he was. Before November was over Soviet communiqués said that the siege of Stalingrad was finally raised, and that the city had been relieved by Red Army forces advancing from the north. Further Soviet advances closed von Paulus's only line of withdrawal. He was still holding grimly on at the end of the year.

These closing days of 1942 brought further evidence

of Hitler's fanatical hatred of the Jews. It was revealed that he had ordered their extermination. The news shocked the Western world, and the United Nations (as Britain and her Allies were then called) condemned Germany's "barbarous and inhuman" conduct.

Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary, read the United Nations statement in the House of Commons. It said: "In all occupied countries Jews are being transported in conditions of appalling horror and brutality to Eastern Europe. In Poland, which has been made the principal Nazi slaughter-house, the ghettoes established by the German invaders are being systematically emptied of all Jews, except a few highly skilled workers required for war industries. None of those taken away is ever heard of again. The able-bodied are slowly worked to death in labour camps. The infirm are left to die or deliberately massacred in mass executions."

Far away on the other side of the world American Marines were waging their long and exhausting struggle against the Japanese in Guadalcanal, a large island north-east of Australia and close to the Solomon Islands. Yet even at this time, when fighting was going on, on so many different fronts, Britain was able to give attention to an important document which could be of no practical value until the war was won.

This was the report on social insurance drawn up by Sir William Beveridge. For months public, Press and Parliament were all to be involved in arguments about the Beveridge Plan, which was designed to secure "freedom from want" by giving Britain a new system of social insurance. The scheme set out a long programme of unemployment, sickness, retirement and other benefits and pensions, including £2 a week retirement pensions and free medical care for all. Yet in all the ensuing months of controversy few people pointed out

that this new kind of social insurance would require a permanently higher level of taxation, and that the public should be prepared to have less money to spend if it wanted the Beveridge Plan.

One of the leading characters in the pre-war drama died at the end of 1942. This was Sir Nevile Henderson, British Ambassador in Berlin at the outbreak of war. His fault in those years had been that he completely misjudged the German situation. He had believed that the Nazi revolution would run its course and be replaced by more peaceable government in Germany. In fact, as the war was proving, only overwhelming force could finally destroy the Nazi evil.

CHAPTER XV

AFRICAN VICTORY

"BEFORE Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat." That summary of the war from the British point of view (which Churchill quotes in his war memoirs) is not strictly accurate. It ignores, for example, the earlier Wavell-O'Connor victory in Africa and the unhappy defeat at Arnhem in 1944. Yet it gives a good impression of the change in the Allied fortunes at the end of 1942. The first weeks of 1943 were to prove that war of reconquest was a slow business. The aggressors had had the advantage of finding their victims almost unprepared. It was a longer job to turn the tables on well-established enemy armies.

Even at Stalingrad, where the German siege was raised before the end of 1942, it was not until January 31 that the German commander, von Paulus, agreed to surrender. He, his Chief of Staff, 14 other generals and an army of 350,000 men were taken prisoner. It was estimated that 100,000 other Germans had been killed in the last three weeks of the fighting.

The impetus of the war in Eastern Europe had now passed entirely to Russia. For months ahead British newspaper headlines told how the Red Army had recaptured this, that or the other Russian town—often mentioning names that most British people had never heard of then and have never heard of since. Certainly the Soviet fighting was heroic. On all fronts the Russians were on the offensive. Yet even when they had their

enemies on the run it took them more than two years to force their way into Berlin.

In Africa, too, the pace of the pincer movement on two fronts seemed to have slowed down. The Eighth Army was still pursuing Rommel with great gusto: it entered Tripoli on January 23 and two days later its vanguard had reached the Tunisian border. But the Anglo-American offensive on the other side had met with stiffer resistance than was expected, and a more or less stable front had been formed in Tunisia. While Allied and Axis armies faced each other on this Tunisian front, Hitler had time to send out more reinforcements from Germany.

By February Rommel's retreating army had joined up with the other Axis forces in Tunisia, so that there were now 14 Axis divisions fighting a two-front campaign. They were still formidable. Long afterwards Montgomery confessed that one of his two anxious moments in the African war was when the Eighth Army approached the Mareth Line—a small-scale Maginot Line which the French had built in Tunisia—and found that Rommel had stopped retreating in order to launch a fierce counter-attack.

This action, fought on March 6, was the Battle of Medenine. Montgomery's later comment was that at that time the Eighth Army had forgotten how to fight a defensive action. "I even found generals looking up their text-books," he said.

None the less, the Eighth Army fought back coolly and skilfully. With the aid of definite air superiority it checked the German counter-offensive and forced Rommel to withdraw again. He gave battle once more on the Mareth Line itself, but a week's fighting ended with complete victory for the Eighth Army. At the end of April it faced the last enemy resistance at Enfidaville.

On the other front the First Army had had to resist a strong German attack at the Kasserine Pass in February. The Americans lost heavily in this action, but the enemy advance was finally checked. Thereafter the two armies were locked in weeks of strenuous fighting which seemed to produce very little result, though in fact the First Army was gradually putting itself into a stronger position. Yet Spring came, and still the victory of Alamein had not led to the full defeat of the Axis forces in Africa.

In Europe the air war continued with hardly a pause. Britain and Germany were still bombing each other, and the papers often reported serious loss of life in Britain. In January of this year 34 schoolchildren were known to have been killed outright, and 30 more were reported missing, when a " tip and run " German raider dropped a bomb on a London school during the dinner hour. On another day four people were killed during a service in an Isle of Wight church.

One of the greatest air-raid tragedies of the war was not, however, the immediate result of a German bomb. It occurred in March, 1943, when people crowded into a tube-railway air-raid shelter at Bethnal Green because the sirens had warned that German bombers were coming over. A woman carrying a bundle and a baby tripped and fell at the foot of the stairs. People coming behind fell on top of her, and soon there was a solid wall of human bodies. In the resulting chaos 178 people died of suffocation; 60 more had to receive hospital treatment.

Our own bombing of European objectives was growing heavier and heavier. Our bombers went as far afield as Italy, and it was during a raid on Turin that Flight-Sergeant R. H. Middleton of the Royal Australian Air Force showed the courage which won him, after his death, the Victoria Cross.

He was the captain of a Stirling bomber, and though terribly wounded he stayed at the controls for four-and-a-half hours after the raid and flew his bomber home through intense anti-aircraft fire. When he was over England, and the damaged plane could not last out much longer, he ordered the crew of five to bale out. Middleton himself crashed into the sea rather than risk a forced landing which might have killed people in streets or houses. The V.C. was awarded "for a devotion to duty in the face of overwhelming odds which is unsurpassed in the annals of the Royal Air Force."

In February the R.A.F. dropped 1,000 tons of bombs in 100 minutes on Lorient, one of the ports on the French Atlantic coast which the Germans used as U-boat bases. Berlin suffered a raid which was twice as heavy as any that London had undergone, and in April R.A.F. photographs showed that many acres of Berlin factories were in ruins.

These were impressive though almost routine demonstrations of our growing air power. In May, 1943, Britain heard with pride of perhaps the most daring and brilliant air exploit of the whole war. This was the amazing raid by Lancaster bombers of 617 Squadron, R.A.F., which resulted in the destruction of the great Moehne and Eder dams in West Germany.

The first reports of this raid claimed that millions of tons of water were sweeping over Hitler's arms centres in the Ruhr. That was a pardonable exaggeration. The arms centres themselves were not submerged. But day after day reconnaissance photographs showed that the bursting of the dams had turned a large part of the Ruhr valley into a lake.

The story of the "dam busters" is one that will always live in air history. The originator of the whole adventure was Barnes Wallis, inventor and aircraft

designer, who became convinced early in the war that the three German dams of Moehne, Eder and Sorpe provided one of the most promising bombing targets the R.A.F. could hope to find. These dams controlled the water supply for nearly all the Ruhr arms and steel factories. Since German steel manufacture required eight tons of water to produce a ton of steel a successful blow at the dams would gravely disrupt German arms production.

But the dams were colossal. They could be assailed only by far bigger bombs than the R.A.F. was using in the early part of the war. Wallis set himself the task of devising a new and much heavier bomb and of adapting Lancaster bombers so that they could carry it. Even then it would be necessary for the bombs to be placed accurately in position from a very low height, so that they could explode like a miniature earthquake and blast big holes in the concrete walls of the dams by sideways pressure.

Wallis's next task—and it was not an easy one—was to convince the Air Ministry that these new bombs, which would weigh nearly four tons, were a practicable proposition. It took time, but at the end of February, 1943, the Air Ministry decided to go ahead with the plan and ordered that the dams should be bombed not later than May. A special squadron of daring and experienced airmen was assembled under the command of Wing-Commander Guy Gibson, and they began to perfect themselves in the low flying that would be so necessary for a successful attack.

The long weeks of training came to an end. A new batch of Lancasters, specially adapted to hold the big bombs, arrived at the aerodrome, and on the evening of May 18 Gibson led his squadron to Germany. Nine aircraft were scheduled to attack the Moehne and Eder

dams; five took the Sorpe dam as their target; and five were in reserve.

The Sorpe escaped destruction. Only one of the five aircraft detailed for this dam was able to reach the target, and the reserve pilots ordered to take over the job found the area clouded in mist. But Gibson's own group bombed the Moehne and Eder dams with devastating effect. The walls of each dam were split, and hundreds of millions of tons of water poured into the Ruhr valley, sweeping over roads and villages and completely cutting off the arms factories' water supply. The floods went as far as a suburb of Kassel, 40 miles away, poured into coal mines and destroyed power stations and waterworks. Never before had so much damage been done to so wide an area by so few bombs.

It was a costly raid. Half the aircraft of 617 Squadron were lost, and in all 56 out of 133 pilots and crew were missing. Three others had escaped by parachute and were taken prisoner. But the dead had not given their lives in vain. All Britain acclaimed this wonderful achievement of bold and accurate bombing.

Gibson himself, who had stayed at the dams throughout the raid to direct his fellow-airmen's bombing, was given the Victoria Cross, to add to his earlier decorations of Distinguished Service Order and bar and the Distinguished Flying Cross and bar. After this great exploit, which came at the end of a long series of raids in which he had taken part, he was deservedly transferred to the Air Ministry; but in 1944 he pleaded to be allowed to take part in one more raid on a Ruhr factory. Unhappily he crashed and was killed on his way home, presumably having been hit by anti-aircraft fire. He was buried in Holland.

Two new aspects of the war came into prominence early in 1943. One was the unfortunate rift in the resis-

tance movement in Yugoslavia; the other—far away in Asia—was the almost legendary achievements of Major-General Orde Wingate's " Chindits " in Burma.

In Yugoslavia General Mihailovic, a loyal supporter of the Yugoslav Royal Family, had begun to organise an armed resistance movement soon after the Germans had overrun his country. This had some success, but when Russia entered the war a rival resistance movement sprang up under the command of a Communist leader who was known by the pseudonym of Tito. These new guerillas called themselves " partisans "; Mihailovic's were known as " chetniks ".

It would have been happier for Yugoslavia—and worse for the Germans—if the two groups of Yugoslav patriots had been able to work together. But they could not do so. Mihailovic was Royalist and anti-Communist; Tito was Communist and republican. It was not surprising that they hated each other almost as much as they hated the Germans. Reports reaching the outside world from Yugoslavia told of Tito's bitter charges that Mihailovic was attacking Croats and Communists instead of fighting Germans and Italians.

The truth of the matter was hard to determine. Obviously Mihailovic did not want to put Yugoslavia into a position in which she would " go Communist " after the war—though that is what actually happened. There is no doubt that at first he fought bravely against the Germans, but later in the war there was evidence that he had collaborated with them against the partisans.

In the Spring of 1943 this Yugoslav dispute raised a difficult problem for Britain. Up till that time Britain had been sending aid to Mihailovic and the chetniks, as the loyal supporters of young King Peter, who had gone into exile with his Government when Yugoslavia fell.

Now the question arose whether British aid should not be sent instead to Tito and the partisans, who apparently had a greater following in Yugoslavia than could be claimed for Mihailovic. It was not long before Britain decided to make direct contact with Tito.

It was at this time, too, that the world first heard of the amazing exploits of Major-General Wingate's "Chindits" in Burma. Though no formal campaign for the recovery of Burma from Japan had yet been opened, British, Indian and Burmese forces were operating on the Burmese frontier in order to harry the Japanese and keep them out of India.

Newspaper correspondents called this jungle front in Burma "the forgotten front". But people suddenly became aware of its existence when the first reports of the Chindits' operations were made public.

Their commander, General Wingate, was a remarkable figure. He was a regular soldier who had been attached to the Sudan defence force in the nineteen-twenties and had been transferred to Palestine three years before the war. This was a time of bitter internal strife between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, and Wingate soon made his mark as a brilliant organiser of guerilla warfare against Arab marauders.

As a major at the outbreak of war he was sent to Abyssinia, where he led a body of troops known as the "Gideon Force" in guerilla fighting against the Italians. His operations were very effective, and when Abyssinia was liberated he entered Addis Ababa at the side of the Emperor Haile Selassie, who was restored to the throne. Besides being a great leader of men, Wingate was also something of an eccentric. It was his habit to go about unshaven and wearing ragged shorts.

From Abyssinia he went to Burma as a major-general. Here he led his mixed force of British, Indian and

Burmese, known as the Chindits, on daring raids behind the Japanese lines. (The name "Chindit" was that given to the curious statues, half-lion, half-griffin, which guard Burmese temples and pagodas.)

In May, 1943, it was revealed that Wingate had just returned to his base from a lengthy operation, in which he had gone 200 miles into Japanese-occupied territory, and had there committed an amazing variety of acts of sabotage—cutting railways, blowing up bridges and destroying airfields and grounded aircraft. Without lines of communication by land, the Wingate Force was supplied entirely by air-lifts during the whole of its three-months raid.

Even if action seemed slow on the main fighting fronts, the world had much to think of in this Spring of 1943. Suddenly, out of the blue, came the report of a strange and sinister event in Russia—the Katyn Woods massacre.

It was Goebbels, that past master of the art of propaganda, who first disclosed the terrible story, clearly with the intention of causing a rift between Russia and the Polish Government in exile, which was then in London. There was ample scope for such a rift, for although after Russia's entry into the war she had released her Polish prisoners and made an alliance with Poland, the Poles could never forget how Russia had stabbed her in the back in the first weeks of the war.

As usual, Goebbels used the German radio for his disclosure. In the middle of April he broadcast the astonishing news that the Germans, after capturing Smolensk, had discovered the bodies of 10,000 Polish officers and other prisoners of war, buried in the Katyn Woods, a few miles away from the city. They had, he declared, been murdered by their Russian captors.

The Soviet Government reacted indignantly. These

7. (*Top*) General de Gaulle at the liberation of Paris, 26th August 1944.

(*Bottom*) Russian and American troops link up on the Elbe, 25th April 1945.

8. (*Top*) The German surrender to Field-Marshal Montgomery, 4th May 1945.
(*Bottom*) The city of Hiroshima after the atom bomb attack, 6th August 1945.

was no doubt that the bodies were there, though conflicting figures about the exact numbers were published both then and since. The figure has risen as high as 14,500 and has also been given as 4,153 definitely known to be murdered, with the fate of many thousands of others unknown. But the Soviet Government at once said that the Polish officers had been killed by the Germans themselves after their capture of Smolensk.

The exiled Polish Government, of which General Sikorski was Prime Minister, was not satisfied with the Soviet explanation. Sikorski had long been seeking information about these missing officers, but the Soviet Government had repeatedly said that it knew nothing about them. He now asked the International Red Cross in Switzerland to send a delegation to Katyn Woods and hold an inquiry there.

Russia regarded this request as a deadly insult, and at once broke off relations with the exiled Polish Government. So began the permanent rift between Russia and the Polish leaders—the rift which led in time to Russia's establishment of a puppet Polish Government and her virtual seizure of all Poland after the war.

Much has been written about the Katyn Woods massacre. Though Russia eventually held an inquiry and proved, to her own satisfaction, that the Poles were slaughtered by the Nazis, it is significant that this horrible deed was not among the Nazi war crimes considered after the war by the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. It is curious, too, that nothing had been heard of these prisoners between the time when the Russians transferred them to Smolensk in 1940 and the day when Goebbels gave news of the massacre. Wherever the truth may lie, it was not surprising that the Polish Government suspected its old enemy, Russia, of having contrived the massacre.

As Spring advanced, the Allies had several victories to hearten them. After a long and arduous struggle the American Marines finally defeated the Japs in Guadalcanal. MacArthur's forces also captured Buna, in New Guinea, and destroyed the Japanese invaders in Papua.

The Japanese were no longer having things all their own way. Nor were the Germans. Gradually the Russians were recapturing such vital places as Rostov, Kharkov and Rzhev, which reopened for them the gate to the West. Kharkov, if they had held it then, would have been a particularly important prize, since there is an old military saying: "He who holds Kharkov controls the Ukraine." But the Germans counter-attacked in force and regained the city. The liberation of the Ukraine had still to come.

At last the war was really ending in Africa. The First Army held on to its key positions in Tunisia in spite of vigorous attacks by the German General von Arnim, who took over the command in Africa when Rommel was invalided home. In April, soon after the Eighth Army attacked Enfidaville, the Americans, British and French began a new offensive along the whole Tunisian front. This was the finishing touch. One day they were nine miles from Bizerta and still advancing. Two days later both Tunis and Bizerta fell, and vast numbers of Germans were taken prisoner.

Attacked on both sides, the Germans were now cornered in the Cape Bon peninsula. But their hopes of escaping across the Mediterranean were doomed to disappointment. They were completely encircled, and on May 12 von Arnim himself and eleven other generals were captured. The total number of prisoners was nearly 250,000.

Valiant deeds had been done in the six-months struggle for Tunisia. One man who won the Victoria

Cross was 22-year-old Lance-Corporal Pat Kenneally, of the Irish Guards. From a ridge which the Guards were holding he saw an enemy company forming up for attack. Without hesitation he charged the whole company by himself, firing his Bren gun from his hip, and made it break up and retreat in disorder.

Another V.C. for gallantry in this campaign was awarded after his death to Lieutenant Lord Lyell, of the Scots Guards, who, with a sergeant, two guardsmen and a lance-corporal, led an attack on two enemy gun crews. He killed the first crew with a hand grenade, and then took on the second crew alone, since the sergeant and the guardsmen were wounded and the lance-corporal was giving covering fire to protect him. Lord Lyell killed many of the second crew with his bayonet before he was overwhelmed by superior numbers and himself was killed.

So the end had come in Africa. The only problem which still had to be solved was that of French authority in the North African territories.

This was a personal issue between Giraud and de Gaulle. Neither man was of a yielding disposition. It was difficult, indeed, even to get them to meet, and when they did so de Gaulle was insistent that he, and he alone, was entitled to hold the French high command. In the end a compromise was reached. It was agreed that Giraud should command all French forces in North and West Africa, while de Gaulle would be French Commander-in-Chief in all other theatres of war.

Alexander had the last word in the North African campaign. When the Eighth Army had entered Tunisia he had sent the following message to Churchill: " Sir, The orders you gave me on August 10, 1942, have been fulfilled. His Majesty's enemies, together with their

impedimenta, have been completely eliminated from Egypt, Cyrenaica, Libya and Tripolitania. I now await your further instructions."

On May 13 he telegraphed again: " Sir, It is my duty to report that the Tunisian campaign is over. All enemy resistance has ceased. *We are masters of the North African shore*."

CHAPTER XVI

RETURN TO EUROPE

While the North African campaign was still being fought, Churchill and Roosevelt had met in January at Casablanca, in French Morocco. Their conference lasted ten days. At the end it was formally announced that they had agreed on war plans for 1943 designed to bring about the unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy and Japan.

Later in the war, and for some time afterwards, the words "unconditional surrender" gave rise to much political argument. Some people said that the Germans would have given in before May, 1945, if they had not been made desperate by knowing that their surrender would have to be unconditional. But this theory is hardly borne out either by the course of the war or by the relations of the German people to Hitler.

Hitler himself would never have surrendered, either conditionally or unconditionally. He had said in September, 1939: "I have once more put on that coat which is the most sacred and dear to me. I will not take it off again until victory is assured, or I will not survive the outcome."

As for the German people, they had no possible means of surrendering on their own account unless they revolted against their *Fuehrer*. But although there were military conspiracies against Hitler, there was never the least indication of a popular uprising. The charge that Churchill and Roosevelt lengthened the war by their

unconditional surrender statement makes a good debating-point, but it is not really convincing.

The Casablanca meeting marked a new stage in Allied co-operation. It is unusual for American Presidents to leave their own country during their term of office. Roosevelt's journey to Casablanca, like his later journeys to Teheran and Yalta, showed that he was ready to undergo much personal discomfort in order to play his full part in the highest Allied councils. These journeys, of course, made much greater physical demands on the partially crippled Roosevelt than on his robust colleagues, Churchill and Stalin.

Casablanca was also a sign of the determination with which the United States was waging the war. Only a few days before the meeting Roosevelt had presented to the United States Congress the biggest Budget ever known in American history. It totalled £27,250,000,000, of which £25,000,000,000 was for war purposes. The latest Lend-Lease figures showed that Russia alone had received £465,000,000 worth of arms and other supplies from the United States. American output of war planes had already reached the figure of 5,489 a month. In Europe U.S. bombers were taking a steadily increasing part in the air raids on Germany and the occupied countries.

Most people could make a shrewd guess at the military plans devised at Casablanca. Churchill had already coined a picturesque phrase about striking at "the soft under-belly of the Axis". This obviously meant that Italy or the Balkans would be easier to attack first than Germany herself. When June began with an overwhelming sea and air attack on Pantellaria, a small island between Tunisia and Sicily, and when the capture of this island was followed by heavy bombing of Sicilian airfields, it seemed likely that Italy would be

the next field for Allied advance and that Sicily would be taken on the way.

But the Allies still wanted to keep Hitler guessing about the exact direction of their next blow. With this object in view British intelligence experts arranged for a dead body, ostensibly that of a Royal Marines officer killed in an air crash, to be floated ashore on the coast of Spain. In the officer's pockets was a fictitious letter from the Imperial General Staff to Alexander, clearly indicating that the Allies intended to invade Europe by way of the Greek mainland rather than through Sicily.

As had been expected, the Spanish Intelligence Service found the letter and had a copy sent to Germany, where Hitler and the High Command were completely deceived by it. Even when the invasion of Sicily had begun Hitler still thought it was a feint. He actually sent Rommel to Greece to prepare to meet the Allied invasion foretold in the bogus letter.

Italy remained the real target, though it took the Allied armies some weeks to prepare for their landing. Early in July Sicily was bombed day and night for a week. On July 9, 1943, the invasion began. A second front in Europe was opened at last, though everyone recognised that an attack on Italy was not *the* Second Front for which Russia and some people in Britain were clamouring. That demand could be met only by the invasion of France.

The armies which invaded Sicily were under the supreme command of Eisenhower, with Alexander as deputy Commander-in-Chief; Montgomery was there with the veteran Eighth Army, and the U.S. Seventh Army was led by General Patton, a striking figure who was known to his troops as " Old Blood and Guts ".

Patton had already fought in Tunisia, but it was not until the Italian campaign that he became well known

outside his own country. He was a fanatical tank enthusiast and was happiest when he and all the troops under his command were engaged in battle; but he had also an undesirable gift for attracting unwelcome notoriety. During this campaign the news rang round the world when Patton slapped an American soldier who was in hospital as a shell-shock case, and he may have been lucky to keep his command after this unfortunate episode. But though Eisenhower reprimanded him, the Supreme Commander would hardly have felt inclined to dismiss such a popular and efficient general as Patton. His great knowledge of tank warfare helped him to make some spectacular—though highly controversial—advances in France and Germany after D-Day.

The Canadians, too, were in at the start of the Allies' return to Europe. Their First Division was sent out from England and landed in Sicily on the first day of the invasion.

The operation went well. A great naval force of 2,500 vessels, ranging from battleships to landing craft, supported the invasion, and although the German and Italian air forces had more than 30 airfields in Sicily they were not strong enough to interfere seriously with our seaborne landings. The Eighth Army captured Syracuse on the second day of the invasion, and within 36 hours three airfields and 100 miles of coast were in Allied hands. But the 75,000 German defenders (uncertainly supported by 275,000 Italians) were not going to give in without fighting. Though the Seventh Army crossed the island and reached Palermo, the Eighth was held up for three weeks in the Catanian plain until further troops were brought over from Tunisia to end the deadlock.

By early August Catania had fallen and the Germans were in full retreat towards Messina. This time the

Allies could not catch them. The Germans carried out their own " Dunkirk " across the Straits of Messina and were able to re-group their forces on the mainland for the Italian campaign. It was disappointing to the Allies that nearly all the Germans had been evacuated before Messina was entered almost simultaneously by the Americans and the 4th Armoured Brigade of the Eighth Army.

With the Germans out of the way there was no further resistance from the Italians. The conquest of Sicily was completed on August 17, just 38 days after the first landings. A remarkable—though not unexpected—feature of the campaign was that everywhere the civilian population gave the invaders a friendly and enthusiastic welcome. The Italians had had enough of the war.

The next move was the invasion of the Italian mainland. But in the meantime surprising events had been taking place in Rome. Mussolini, the first of the European dictators and hitherto the all-powerful ruler of Italy, had been unceremoniously sacked by the Fascist Grand Council. The King of Italy had resumed control of the country with a leading soldier, Marshal Badoglio, as Prime Minister.

This momentous meeting of the Grand Council was held on July 24. Mussolini's pretensions to be the unconquerable defender of Italy had been harshly exposed. Sicily was falling; Rome had been bombed by the Allies, though special care had been taken to avoid the destruction of historical, cultural or religious monuments; and it was quite clear that the mainland would soon be invaded. Yet Mussolini was so puffed up with conceit that he told a friend before the Grand Council meeting: " I shall be strong and dominate the situation as usual."

He did not do so. Count Grandi, a former Italian Ambassador in London, moved a resolution calling on King Victor Emmanuel of Italy to resume his full powers. This obviously implied the end of Mussolini's dictatorship. After nine hours' debate the resolution was carried by 19 votes to 17. Mussolini's son-in-law, Ciano, was one of those who voted against him.

In the face of this hostile vote Mussolini felt bound to offer his resignation to the King, though he was sure it would not be accepted. He was wrong again. The King took him at his word and readily accepted his offer to resign. On July 26 Mussolini was surprised to find himself a prisoner of State. The first of the Axis dictators had toppled from his pedestal.

Badoglio, the new Prime Minister, was resolved to get Italy out of the war as soon as he could. In August he sent an envoy to Lisbon to open overtures for peace with British and American representatives. This meeting had to be kept secret from the Germans, since Badoglio had good reason to fear that Hitler would take armed control of Italy rather than let the whole country pass to the Allied side. The Lisbon negotiations were satisfactory, and a few days later an Italian general arrived in Syracuse to sign the formal terms of surrender. They were signed, strangely enough, on September 3, just four years after Britain had entered the war.

In accordance with these terms the Italian Fleet escaped to Malta and there gave itself up to the British. But though the Italians were no longer part of the Axis, Italy itself was soon to be the scene of fierce and prolonged fighting.

Hitler had rightly guessed that Italy, after Mussolini's fall, could no longer be depended on as an ally. German forces swiftly encircled Rome, and after some

slight resistance by Italian army units and Roman "partisans" they occupied the city on September 11. Hitler had no intention of giving the Allies a "walk-over". He was making Italy a battle-ground for German armies ranged against Allied invaders.

Hitler made one unexpected political move in Italy. This was the rescue of Mussolini from captivity. After being moved from one place to another as a prisoner of State, the ex-dictator had been taken to a hotel on the Gran Sasso, a lofty plateau in the Apennines, where it was hoped that no one could reach him. But on September 12 Hitler sent a body of parachutists and a famous commando leader, Captain Skorzeny, to bring Mussolini out of his internment for a meeting at Munich.

The rescue operation was carried out smoothly and without casualties. Mussolini, once the supreme ruler of all Italy, was now ordered by Hitler to set himself up as a puppet dictator in the northern part of the country.

The last eighteen months of Mussolini's life were passed in this ineffective and humiliating role. His greatest exercise of power was in staging the shameful "treason" trial at Verona, where he wreaked his vengeance on those who had voted against him in the Grand Council. Though most of his opponents were condemned to death, only a few were actually in Mussolini's hands at the time of the trial. Among these few, who were duly executed, were his son-in-law Ciano and the aged General de Bono.

But long before the Germans had captured Rome and Mussolini had been rescued, the Allies had invaded Italy. On the very day when the armistice was being signed Montgomery sent the first part of the Eighth Army across the Straits of Messina on to the "toe" of Italy, where the Italian coastal regiments made only

feeble resistance, though they did not yet know about the surrender. The Eighth Army was quickly able to seize and hold the whole of the Calabrian peninsula, and then to begin its advance northward to join up with the Fifth Army under the American General Mark Clark. This army had been ordered to land further north at Salerno, which had been chosen because there were good beaches and it was not far from Naples.

The Salerno landing was more difficult. The Germans were waiting for it and quickly had five divisions to oppose to the Fifth Army. Though early reports said hopefully that opposition on the beaches was slight, the German counter-attacks were formidable and for a time the beachhead position was critical. At this juncture the landing-party was given valuable support by bombers of the Strategic Air Force and by the great naval guns of the *Warspite* and the *Valiant*, firing over the shore. The German counter-offensive was broken off, and the Fifth Army began its advance to Naples.

By September 30 it was in the outer suburbs, and on October 2 British newspapers proudly proclaimed: "Naples ours—now for Rome!" On that day a famous British title appeared in the casualty-lists. The Duke of Wellington, descendant of the Iron Duke, had been killed in Italy while serving as a commando captain.

Marshal Badoglio now declared war on Germany, and the Western Allies accepted Italy as a co-belligerent—i.e. a country fighting at our side, but not an ally. (This agreement aroused the same kind of criticism which had greeted the "deal with Darlan" in Africa.) Kesselring, the German Commander-in-Chief in Italy, withdrew to the Volturno before the advancing Fifth Army. Yet Rome was not so near as the optimists hoped.

Both Allied armies had to fight their way. The Eighth

Army, which had turned north along the two coast roads from Italy's "toe", captured the airfields round Foggia, raced over the Biferno and resolutely forced the Trigno, after a dour battle which cost the 78th Division over 1,000 casualties.

The next river—the Sangro—was a still more forbidding obstacle, but Montgomery decided to cross it and make an attack on the Gustav Line—the Germans' winter defence line. But though the Sangro was crossed after a fierce battle, severe weather and unexpected resistance on a ridge between Ortona and Orsogna held up the Eighth Army's offensive at the end of the year. In the meantime the Fifth Army had advanced from Naples and crossed the Volturno. Kesselring had at last decided to make his stand on yet another river—the Garigliano. The Fifth Army prepared to attack him there early in the New Year.

While American, British and Commonwealth forces were driving Germany back on this second front, the Red Army successfully countered a new German attempt to assume the offensive again on the Eastern front. This Autumn the Russians were still on the move. They took Kharkov again. They pressed on to Smolensk —the city which Hitler had seen as a great milestone on the way to Moscow, and which Russia now regarded as a milestone on the way to Berlin. Smolensk fell at the end of September, and Soviet armies crossed the Dnieper. Goebbels tried to console the German people by calling defeat in the East "the greatest withdrawal history has ever known".

The German people needed consolation. British and American bombs were falling on their cities at an unprecedented rate, sometimes as much as 15,000 tons of bombs in 20 nights. Hamburg suffered three 2,000-ton raids in a week, and the fires which were then started

burned for six days. In August, on the third anniversary of the opening of the Battle of Britain, the Allies gave Berlin the sharpest and fiercest raid ever inflicted on a capital city. It lasted 50 minutes, during which 34 tons of bombs were falling on Berlin every minute.

A daring and valuable raid on the German-occupied oilfields at Ploesti, in Rumania, showed that the Allies now had the planes and the bases which allowed them to roam at will over the whole Continent. Britain revealed also that she had a new weapon in her armoury, though the occasions for using it were not, in fact, to prove very numerous. This was the midget submarine, which had a crew of four and was able to get much closer to an enemy ship than an ordinary submarine could hope to do.

The first announcement of its use was made in October, when the Admiralty stated that British midget submarines had torpedoed the German battleship, *Tirpitz*, 30 miles inside a Norwegian fjord. Three of the midgets were missing after the raid, and their crews were taken prisoner. Two of the submarine commanders—Lieutenants Place and Cameron—were awarded the Victoria Cross.

At this stage of the war British people began to feel hopeful of early victory. After the landing in Italy bets were made that the war would be over by Christmas.

This mood of buoyant optimism among ordinary people received no encouragement in high quarters. Churchill reminded Britain that Hitler still controlled 300 German divisions. General Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa, declared: "The war will go on for some time, and I doubt whether it will be over before the end of 1944." Roosevelt's friend, Harry Hopkins, was sure that the Allies still had a long way to go. Though he looked forward to victory over both Ger

many and Japan by 1945, he observed: "I believe that two years of hard fighting lie ahead of us. Two years at least." Since Japan did not surrender until August, 1945, this forecast, made in August, 1943, was remarkably accurate.

Yet nothing could prevent British people from talking and thinking a great deal about what was to happen "after the war". Debate on the Beveridge Plan continued both inside and outside Parliament, and R. A. Butler, President of the Board of Education, announced the Coalition Government's post-war educational programme, which included the raising of the school age to 15 and free secondary education for all.

Victory in Tunisia had added a few amenities to Britain's war-time food supplies. The North African sardine canneries had been restored to pre-war working order, and 40,000,000 tins were soon on their way to Britain. Oranges, too, became more easily available. Lord Woolton announced that 84,000,000 oranges had arrived in Britain and that "serve children first" was the order to greengrocers. Children under five were to be allowed 2 lb. each, and those between 5 and 16 1 lb. each. Adults could buy any stocks that were left unsold after four days.

The President of the Board of Trade was concerned about children, too. He officially ruled that children with big feet should be allowed extra clothing coupons. Claimants would be measured at school to see if they were large enough to qualify.

Clothes were still a problem for everyone. A Board of Trade inquiry in 1943 reached the conclusion that large numbers of men and women must have given up wearing underclothes, choosing instead to spend their modest quota of clothing coupons on outer wear which allowed them to look smart and well-dressed in spite of

clothes rationing. Figures showed that the number of coupons used for the purchase of nightclothes and underwear was steadily going down; but more coupons were being used for overcoats, suits, costumes and dresses.

This August some American sympathisers made a pleasant clothing gesture to the Wrens—the girls of the Women's Royal Naval Service. Since Service girls who wished to get married had no coupons for civilian clothes, a number of American women decided to help Wrens to be "married in white". They sent over nine beautiful wedding dresses in marquisette, satin, moiré and lace, exclusively for the use of Wrens. Any Wren could hire a dress for her wedding day for the modest charge of ten shillings.

In August an important military appointment called new attention to the "forgotten front" in Burma. Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had been Chief of Combined Operations since March, 1942, was made Commander-in-Chief, South-East Asia. This was the beginning of the famous command which was soon known as S.E.A.C. His appointment raised hopes of bigger Allied activities on the Burmese front.

This exciting phase of the war which re-established the Allies in Europe also raised a sinister question-mark for British people. Hitler had boasted from time to time about his possession of "secret weapons" which would turn the fortunes of war in Germany's favour. In October a familar war-time figure—the "neutral business man who has recently returned to Stockholm from Germany"—told the world that these secret weapons were nearly ready for use. He described them as a rocket-bomb and a big gun that could hit London from the Continent. Churchill himself confirmed in the House of Commons that Hitler had rocket-bombs in active

preparation. One had been used in the Italian campaign.

Britain had usually laughed at Hitler's "secret weapon" stories and had thought they were merely bluff. But this time the evidence seemed more convincing. The R.A.F. gave its own support to Hitler's boasts by making a heavy raid on Peenemunde, the German research station on the Baltic coast where it was believed that secret weapons were being devised. Yet even the unpleasant possibility of new kinds of air attacks could not disturb Britain's firm conviction that victory was now assured, even though, as the "high-ups" had given warning, it might take some time to make it complete.

CHAPTER XVII

FROM TEHERAN TO D-DAY

"SOME say he is with the Emperor of Russia; other some, he is in Rome; but where is he, think you?" Lucio's comment on the Duke's travels in *Measure for Measure* seems particularly appropriate to Churchill's war-time journeys. These journeys were, of course, a "top secret". Yet they were soon given away by the simple fact that Churchill was not in Britain. When days went by without the Prime Minister's appearance in the House of Commons, and without any reports of those well-turned and inspiring speeches that war-time Britain knew so well, it became perfectly clear that Churchill was off again to some secret rendezvous to take part in a highest-level conference. In due time his destination and the nature of the conference would be revealed. Until then people could only ask: "Where is he, think you?"

One of these disappearances occurred in November, 1943. This time his destination was Teheran, the capital of Persia.

Earlier in the year Stalin had agreed that a meeting between himself, Churchill and Roosevelt was "absolutely necessary" at this stage of the war. It was time for the three Allied chiefs to talk over the plans for Operation Overlord—the code-name given to the coming Anglo-American invasion of France.

Churchill proposed that the meeting should be held in London, but Stalin, unlike Bulganin and Kruschev

in 1956, had no desire to come to Britain. He suggested Persia, and Churchill agreed that they should meet at Teheran. The meeting was fixed for the end of November, and before it was held the three Foreign Ministers of Britain, the United States and Moscow held a preliminary conference at Moscow to clear the way for the "Big Three". One result of the Foreign Ministers' meeting was that the three Powers formally guaranteed to restore the independence of Austria after the war.

On their way to Teheran Roosevelt and Churchill met at Cairo, where Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese generalissimo, also joined them for talks. Together they discussed plans for the further prosecution of the war against Japan, and Churchill and Roosevelt agreed, on behalf of Britain and the United States, to restore Formosa to China after the war.

This island between China and Japan was ceded by the Chinese to the Japanese in 1895 and had been in Japanese hands ever since. At the time of the Cairo talks the Anglo-American pledge seemed harmless and reasonable. It was to cause immense trouble after the war, when Chiang Kai-shek had been driven out of China by the Communists and had taken refuge with his Nationalist army in this very island. The question then arose: had the Western Allies guaranteed to return Formosa to Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Government or to any Chinese Government which gained effective control of the mainland? The Cairo agreement could be interpreted either way, and it is not surprising that the Formosa problem gave rise to years of international dispute.

Important decisions were taken when Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin met at Teheran. They agreed that Operation Overlord should be launched during May, 1944, on the northern coast of France, and that an

operation against southern France should be undertaken about the same time.

Churchill would have preferred the subsidiary operation to be in northern Italy or the Balkans, but Stalin was insistent that southern France must be the second objective. He did not want any Anglo-American armies interfering with his own plans for "liberating" the Balkans. He promised, however, to start a big offensive on the Eastern front to coincide with the opening of Overlord, so that Germany would have no chance of transferring forces from east to west.

Another vital decision taken at this conference was that Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia should be backed up by Allied commando operations and should receive the larger supplies of arms and equipment. So another nail was driven into the coffin of the Royalist general, Mihailovic, and another step was taken—for urgent military reasons—towards the establishment of a Communist Yugoslavia. From now on it was useless for young King Peter of Yugoslavia to call Tito an impostor and to order him to support Mihailovic. With the backing of the Big Three behind him Tito assumed responsibility for the legal Government of Yugoslavia, and Britain sent out Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean, M.P., as liaison officer at the guerilla leader's headquarters.

At Teheran the Big Three also discussed the possibility of bringing Turkey into the war on the Allied side, and made tentative proposals for a settlement of the post-war Polish-Russian frontier. Stalin promised that Russia would come into the war against Japan as soon as Germany was defeated. Roosevelt was highly gratified by this promise, since the American high command feared that it might be a long and costly business to expel Japan from all the islands and Asiatic territories she had occupied. In the end the Soviet pledge

was quite unnecessary. Thanks to the atom-bomb, Britain and the United States were able to dispose of Japan without Russian assistance.

For obvious reasons the really important decisions taken at Teheran were kept secret. The world had to be satisfied with the bare statement that the Big Three had made plans for the destruction of Hitler and had reached complete agreement on the scope and timing of operations which would be conducted from the east, west and south.

So 1943 ended for Britain with high hopes—officially confirmed at Teheran—of an invasion of France in 1944. At the same time news of an American landing in New Britain, far away in the Pacific Ocean, was an encouraging sign that the Far Eastern war was gradually swinging round in the Allies' favour. In spite of the relatively slow progress on the Italian front Britain settled down to enjoy the happiest Christmas she had known since the war began.

Even the Board of Trade played Santa Claus. Wartime trading restrictions forbade retail shops from obtaining more than a fixed quota of most of the goods they dealt in, even if the goods themselves might be piling up in wholesalers' warehouses. This year the Board of Trade kind-heartedly lifted all the quota restrictions on children's toys, though some prohibitions still remained. No metal toys were on sale, and no toy of any kind was to cost more than 24*s.* 5*d.*

This price limitation was part of the general national policy of encouraging people not to spend money unnecessarily but to lend it for war purposes. A National Savings advertisement in December portrayed a young woman with a handbag under her arm, but carrying no shopping bag or parcels. The heading was: "Here's a woman carrying home all her Christmas presents!" The

advertisement went on to explain that she had bought savings stamps and savings gift tokens—" just the right gifts to make this a Savings Christmas—this the most vital Christmas of the war ".

This Christmas the King's daughters presented pantomime at Windsor, supported by a lively chorus of schoolchildren and with music played by a Guards band. Princess Elizabeth was Aladdin, and Princess Margaret was the Princess. Both girls tap-danced and sang popular songs.

In Italy a small body of Eighth Army men celebrated Christmas with an unexpected treat. They were sent out to capture two German guns, and were able to surprise the gun crews and take them prisoner. They were then delighted to find that the Germans had been cooking a goose for Christmas dinner. The Eighth Army men promptly sat down and ate it.

Other soldiers spent their Christmas on the " forgotten front " in Burma. One report from that front told of nursing sisters joining troops for a carol service in a little bamboo church called St. John's-in-the-jungle.

The new year, 1944, was full of promise for the Western world. Hitler had been given formal notice that Britain and the United States would liberate Western Europe. Invasion could not be long delayed.

Planning for Operation Overlord occupied many of the best military brains of Britain and the United States. At the head of all the planners was the American General George C. Marshall, U.S. Chief of Staff and head of the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff, whose mastery of organisational and administrative problems was reflected in the success of D-Day.

The public knew nothing of all these plans, but odd scraps of news gave clear indications that D-Day was drawing nearer. (Even civilians had already learnt to

use the military code-word, D-Day, as the appropriate name for the opening of the great invasion.) It had previously been announced that Eisenhower would be Supreme Commander of the Second Front operations, with the British Air Chief Marshal Tedder as his deputy at Supreme Headquarters. In January Eisenhower set up his headquarters in Britain. At the same time Montgomery said good-bye to the Eighth Army in Italy, and came home to take up his post as commander of the Second Front expeditionary army.

Early this year a coastal belt ten miles deep from the Wash to Land's End and an area round the Firth of Forth were proclaimed "protected areas", which visitors were not allowed to enter. These were the areas in which troops were being trained for the invasion—the British in camps from Norfolk to Hampshire, the Americans from Hampshire to Cornwall and in South Wales.

Certainly invasion was in the air. Even Goebbels told Germany that we were not bluffing. At a Mansion House lunch Montgomery gave the Second Front its battle-cry: "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered." But he warned his audience: "We are preparing to take part in the biggest tug-of-war the world has ever seen. If any should let go of the rope, then we lose the match."

So the world waited for D-Day, and while Hitler completed the plans for his secret weapons Britain again proved that she was second to none in military inventiveness. The joint efforts of Britain, American and other scientists which would shortly produce the atom-bomb were still a "top secret". But January brought the impressive announcement that Britain and the United States would soon have jet-propelled fighter aircraft in production.

This was the first indication that the problems in-

volved in jet-propelled flight had been mastered. The successful inventor was 36-year-old Group-Captain Frank Whittle, of the R.A.F., who had been working on jet problems since 1933. His achievement put Britain well ahead of Germany, for although the Germans were also working on "jets" their first model had required a special kind of fuel and had to be scrapped when the R.A.F. destroyed the Hamburg chemical factory where an essential component of this special fuel was made. The German designer Messerschmitt had then produced another model, but the delays caused by changing from one model to another had allowed Whittle and the Allies to take the lead in the race to put the first "jets" into the air.

The beginning of 1944 brought further Russian advances. General Vatutin's armies entered Poland, and the exiled Polish Government anxiously sought an opportunity of discussing Poland's future with Russia. In the north the Russians smashed the German ring round Leningrad and reached the Esthonian frontier. On the Ukraine front the Nazi General Manstein was driven back by the Red Army and was promptly dismissed by Hitler. Soviet forces began a drive for Odessa and reached the borders of Rumania.

Hitler's answer to the general Soviet offensive was to strengthen his hold on his satellite countries by sending more troops into them. Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria came under German military occupation. But still the Red Army advanced. In April Marshal Koniev claimed to have captured 57 towns and villages in Rumania. In the same month Odessa was retaken, and a few weeks later Russia regained her great fortress of Sebastopol. The Crimea was free again.

These were fine achievements, but British people were more closely concerned with the Italian front than

with Russia's gradual re-entry into territory she had lost in 1941. Since Eisenhower's return to England Alexander had taken command of the land operations, and General Sir Oliver Leese had succeeded Montgomery as commander of the Eighth Army. The Fifth Army was still commanded by Mark Clark.

As the New Year began, the Eighth Army was temporarily held up by the Germans' Orsogna-Ortona defence line, and the Fifth Army had more promising scope for advance. But there was a big obstacle in front of it. The headland of Monte Cassino, with its monastery, the ancient Benedictine abbey, barred the road to Rome from the south.

The Italian General Staff had built elaborate defences in this area before Italy gave up the war and it believed that it had made Cassino impregnable. These defences had been taken over by the Germans, who could be expected to use them much more skilfully than the Italians could ever have done. This was the tough nut which the Fifth Army had now to crack.

Its first assault was a costly failure. American divisions broke through the Germans' Gustav Line, but after days of fierce fighting were held up by the fortifications of Monte Cassino. Their casualties were so heavy that they had to be withdrawn from the battle. The Cassino offensive was then entrusted to General Freyberg and his New Zealand Corps, which Alexander had transferred from the Eighth Army to reinforce the Fifth.

While the Cassino battle was still in progress the Allied high command made a bold attempt to shorten the war in Italy by a new landing. This was at Anzio, more than 50 miles behind the German lines. It was hoped to establish a bridgehead for a flank attack on the Alban Hills, which would open another way to

Rome. Since the operation was expected to involve great danger, a joint Anglo-American force, consisting of two divisions, commandos, paratroops and tanks, was formed into a new army corps to carry it out, under the command of the American Major-General Lucas.

Anzio is one of the much-debated operations of the Second World War. It began with brilliant success. With strong support from fighters and bombers, which attacked the roads leading to the Anzio area, some 50,000 men and more than 500 vehicles landed at Anzio and the neighbouring beach of Nettuno on January 22. The enemy was taken completely by surprise. No German forces were on hand to resist the landing parties. Within a few hours the British and American troops were firmly established, and Allied planes triumphantly dropped 2,000,000 leaflets telling Italy that the Allies had landed only 30 miles from Rome.

General Lucas's orders were to secure the beachhead and advance to the Alban Hills. The beachhead did not take much securing, since there were no enemy troops in the neighbourhood; but Lucas spent more than a week in consolidating defences and strengthening his force by further landings of men, tanks, munitions and stores. By January 29 he had 70,000 men ashore, with 508 guns and 237 tanks, which constituted a formidable fighting force. On the next day he launched his attack on the Alban Hills. It was too late.

No one can be certain how far the Anzio landing-parties might have advanced if they had exploited the situation at once when they found that there were no German defenders. But the delay in taking the offensive had given Kesselring time to amass a strong force to resist any attempt to break out from the beachhead. He built up his strength from day to day, and when Lucas set out for the Alban Hills three full German

divisions were waiting to bar his way. Others were hastening to join them.

The Allied advance had no chance of success in the face of the greater numbers which Kesselring now had in the field. Within four days the Anzio forces were themselves on the defensive, and the Germans were counter-attacking in strength. The German attack was held off, but the landing-parties had now completely lost the initiative. Another German attack was launched on February 16 with the avowed object of driving the Anzio corps into the sea. This, too, was beaten off, but thereafter the corps was penned up inside its own bridgehead. In Churchill's graphic phrase, we had hoped to hurl a wild cat on to the shore, and all we had got was a stranded whale.

None the less, the British and American troops engaged in the Anzio fighting put up a most gallant defence. One of the heroes of those days was Major Philip Sidney (now Lord de L'Isle and Dudley), a descendant of his Elizabethan namesake. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his "superb courage and disregard of danger" during a critical phase at the beachhead, at a time when every yard of ground was of vital importance.

Though the untimely delay after the Anzio landing appeared to have turned success into failure, this diversionary action may yet have had an effect on the course of the war. Before Anzio Kesselring had been ordered to send five of his best divisions to North-West Europe to join the other German armies there in resisting the coming invasion. Thanks to the new threat which faced the Germans in Italy, these divisions were never sent.

The Cassino battle, which was resumed in February, was another Allied reverse. On this occasion the Allies

bombed and destroyed the famous monastery itself, though Clark, the Fifth Army commander, was most reluctant to order the bombing. He felt sure (and remained sure after the war) that the monastery was not being used by German troops. But again Cassino held out. The New Zealand Corps, which included the 2nd New Zealand Division and the 4th Indian Division, made another attempt in March, but although it fought stubbornly and suffered tremendous casualties, it had to withdraw again without final success.

It was not, in fact, until May that Cassino was taken by a Polish corps under General Anders, who had fought both Germans and Russians in Poland in 1939, had been taken prisoner by the Russians and had been released when Russia entered the war. The Poles are a great fighting nation. It is on record that when Anders was planning the attack on this tough objective which had caused such tragic loss of life, he explained that one of his brigades must lead the assault on Cassino while the other stayed in reserve. Both brigade-commanders at once claimed the privilege of leading the assault, and it took some time to settle the acrimonious argument between them.

The successful Polish attack on Cassino was part of a general Allied offensive, in which both the Eighth and Fifth Armies took part and the Anzio beachhead forces were at last able to break out and join them. It culminated in the long-awaited capture of Rome on June 4. Clark's Fifth Army had the privilege of being the first to enter Rome.

Good news had been coming for some time from other theatres of war. The establishment of the South-East Asia Command had soon led to the opening of an offensive in Burma. The Fourteenth Army, commanded by General William Slim, advanced 100 miles into

Japanese-occupied territory. Unhappily Wingate was killed in a plane crash at this time, and could no longer conduct his brilliant guerilla operations. In the Pacific, too, MacArthur was still harrying the Japanese. American and Australian troops made further landings in New Guinea, and after a stern struggle the island was freed.

At home, as Britain waited for D-Day, Allied bombing raids on France and Germany became concentrated on "pre-invasion" targets. Railways were a special object of attention, and on a single day in May as many as 2,000 British and United States planes took part in the raids.

The attacks were made on important goods yards and engine servicing depots as well as on the railway tracks, and by the middle of May 15 big goods yards and 40 service depots were out of action. The necessary repairs were on such a colossal scale that main lines were often closed for a fortnight after a successful raid. The R.A.F. was now dropping 12,000 lb. bombs on individual targets. Previously the biggest bomb in regular use had been the 4,000 lb. "block-buster"—so called because it could destroy a whole block of buildings.

Germany still retaliated with frequent and heavy raids on London, and about this time a London doctor reported in the medical Press his discovery of a new disease, which he called "shelter-leg". This was an unsightly swelling below the knee caused by sleeping in deck-chairs in air-raid shelters. The doctor said that there was no effective remedy, but that elderly people should be urged to sleep in bunks instead of deck-chairs.

In the light of later events one of Churchill's speeches in this eventful year is especially worth remembering. Speaking in May about the post-war United Nations

organisation, which had not then been planned in detail, he declared: "We must arm our world organisation and make sure that, within the limits assigned to it, it has overwhelming military power." At that time many people hoped that the United Nations would be a great world police force, with sufficient strength to ensure that no war could break out anywhere. It was a great ideal, but it has not been put into effect.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GREAT INVASION

BRITAIN was in buoyant mood on the eve of D-Day. The week before the invasion was Whit Week, which had brought with it the hottest Whit Monday for a dozen years. In spite of the ban on seaside trips in so many areas, people had taken full advantage of the fine weather. In London the Serpentine Lido was so full that it was almost impossible to dive, or even to swim. A cricket match at Lord's between English and Australian teams attracted 25,680 spectators, and "Ground full" notices were placed outside. Bank Holiday racing at Ascot drew the record war-time crowd of 24,000, and visitors had the satisfaction of seeing Gordon Richards ride three winners.

That week was also notable for the first visit which Princess Elizabeth paid alone to the City of London. She had just passed her eighteenth birthday, and she attended the Diamond Jubilee, at the Mansion House, of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Newpaper photographs showed her wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat and a flowered silk dress. In her speech she said: "I trust that in the days to come every child's life will be a full and happy one."

One cloud in the generally bright sky was that farmers were finding themselves seriously short of labour. During the war land girls—members of the Women's Land Army—had taken the place of many men farm workers called up for military service. Their

green jumpers and corduroy breeches had become familiar in most parts of the country. Now the supply seemed to be drying up, and new enrolments were not enough to make up for the girls who left to get married or for other reasons. To save the harvest, an urgent call went out for 500 more land girls every week.

Whit Week ended, and so did the spell of warm weather. The next week began with the news of the fall of Rome and of Crown Prince Umberto's assumption of Royal powers in place of his father, King Victor Emmanuel. On the same day there was much activity by Allied bombers on the invasion coast. But still Britain did not know that the great moment for which all were waiting had come.

At last, on the morning of Tuesday, June 6, 1944, the secret was out. B.B.C. bulletins broke the news. This was D-Day. British and American troops had crossed the Channel. The invasion had begun.

Twenty-four hours were enough to show that this was the real thing. Ecstatic headlines proclaimed: "Allies now driving inland." "Lodgment on wide front." "We hold three bridgeheads." By some, as it seemed, almost miraculous means a huge British and American army had landed safely in France in spite of the Germans' long years of coastal defence preparation. The free world cheered the invaders—and at the same time wondered how we were going to keep up the flow of supplies to our men.

In good time the mystery was explained. Serious preparation for the invasion of Europe had begun as far back as January, 1943. It was one of the results of the "unconditional surrender" meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt at Casablanca. It was then decided to set up an Inter-Allied Staff, under a British officer, Lieut.-General F. E. Morgan, to make plans for the

operation. The Normandy coast was chosen as the landing site, because it was less strongly defended than the Pas de Calais area and the Germans were unlikely to suspect an attack on a stretch of coast which contained no sizeable harbour between Le Havre and Cherbourg.

With sufficient air and sea support and an adequate number of transport ships and landing-craft, it was considered quite feasible to carry a large army across the Channel. The bigger problem was to find harbours to maintain the flow of supplies and reinforcements. The Dieppe raid had shown that it was impossible to start an invasion by capturing a big port. Yet somehow or other harbours would have to be found.

It was in June, 1943, that Commodore J. Hughes-Hallett, Naval Chief of Staff in Morgan's planning organisation, had the brilliant idea of taking our own harbours across the Channel. They would be made in Britain and towed over. At selected points on the Normandy beaches prefabricated piers would be thrown out to sea. These would be protected by artificial breakwaters based on blockships brought over from Britain and sunk at pre-arranged distances from each other. This was the origin of what came to be known as Mulberry harbours—the name Mulberry being used while the harbours were being built simply because it could give nobody any clue to what it really meant.

That was one of the great secrets of the invasion. These vast synthetic harbours, duly towed across the Channel, turned the Normandy coast into a safe landing-place, and provided an efficient substitute for the big ports until they fell at last into our hands.

Another of the invasion secrets went by the code-name of Pluto—a simpler name which stood for Pipe Line Under the Ocean. During the war a great network of underground petrol supply lines had been built in

Britain to provide safe supplies from the ports to the inland distributing centres. This system was now extended across the Channel, so that our invading armies could receive petrol supplies without interference.

According to the arrangements made at the Teheran conference D-Day was a month late. But when Eisenhower and Montgomery took up their commands they found that they had not sufficient time to mount the operation in the appointed month of May. Eisenhower then chose June 5 as the date for D-Day, but in view of the change in the weather after Whitsun he decided to postpone it for another twenty-four hours.

Postponement was an anxious matter for the Allied chiefs. The tides were suitable for our invasion plans only on June 5, 6 and 7. If this period went by without a landing, the whole operation would have had to be put off for another fortnight, so leaving a fortnight's less summer weather for our invasion campaign. But the forecast of slightly better weather on June 6, with less favourable conditions thereafter, induced Eisenhower to begin operations on that date.

So the great invasion was launched. At British ports 37 divisions and 4,000 ships were ready for the word "Go": the very first wave of the attack was to be carried out by 150,000 men. Air support totalled 11,000 planes.

To mislead the Germans, dummy ships were collected in ports facing the Pas de Calais, a dummy pumping-head for the oil pipe lines was set up on the cliffs facing Boulogne, and much bogus army activity took place in Kent and Sussex. On the actual night before the attack British aircraft weaved slowly backwards and forwards at the Pas de Calais end of the Channel, so as to create on German radar screens the false impression that a large convoy was crossing in that area. The ingenious

forms of deception proved very useful. Von Rundstedt, the German Commander-in-Chief, kept strong forces near Calais while the Allies were striking further west.

On the morning of June 6, 1944, three airborne divisions—one British and two American—dropped in Normandy to prepare the way for the seaborne invasion. They did invaluable work behind the German lines—disrupting communications by blowing up bridges and railway lines and attacking important defence points. They were followed by a tremendous armada which crossed the Channel with a vast air fleet to give it protection. Five Allied divisions, fully equipped with tanks, swarmed out of the landing-craft on to the beaches at various points between Cherbourg and Le Havre.

The liberation of Europe had begun. France was nearing the end of her servitude. General de Gaulle, who had carried the proud banner of Fighting France for so many years, was soon to come back to his own country and to be welcomed in the market-square of Bayeux with roses, carnations and tears.

These were thrilling days for Britain and all her Allies. After the indisputable success of the first landings the very next morning brought news of the capture of Bayeux. So far, everything was going well, but the military chiefs knew that there could be no rapid advance. They must wait for that until more of the great armies waiting in Britain had been carried across the Channel, to land in Normandy within the safe protection of Mulberry Harbours. In the meantime they knew that von Rundstedt would rally bigger forces to face them, and that for some time the invaders were sure to be outnumbered.

Neither Eisenhower, who directed operations from his headquarters, nor Montgomery, who was in actual command of the fighting armies, had any intention

of making the kind of immediate dash inland which should have been made (but was not made) at Anzio. Montgomery rightly consolidated his bridgeheads and created a firm 60-mile invasion front from Caen to the Cotentin peninsula. The time for the break-through had not yet come.

The American forces, under General Omar Bradley, had the first opportunity of extending the front. While the British Second Army, led by General Miles Dempsey, was standing firm against furious German attacks, the Americans were able to advance westward to Cherbourg. By June 19 they had cut the Cherbourg peninsula. Six days later they entered the port itself, but found that the Germans had so effectively wrecked the docks that they could not be used for two months. June ended with the beachhead firmly established and the Allies temporarily on the defensive.

As Britain waited hopefully for a break-out from the beachhead, London and the south of England had themselves to face a new and unpleasant invader. One of Hitler's secret weapons had come into action at last.

In fact, Hitler had three secret weapons. One was a flying bomb which turned earthwards and exploded just before landing when it reached a certain distance from its launching-point; another was the rocket missile used later in the war; the third was a long-range gun designed to bombard London from the Continent. The first of these, which made its début exactly a week after D-Day, was then known in Britain as the P-plane (pilotless plane) or the flying bomb. Later the R.A.F. named it the " doodle-bug ", and later still it was briefly described by its German name of V1, while the rocket missile was known as V2.

The long-range gun was never brought into action. It

might never have worked, but in any case the projected gun-site was spotted by the R.A.F. and received such ferocious bombing that the Germans could not even attempt to use it. This was just as well. If the long-range gun had lived up to Hitler's expectations, it would have fired 600 tons of explosives a day at London.

Britain was ready for the V1s. A triple defence line had been prepared for their expected appearance, consisting of a balloon barrage, a ring of anti-aircraft guns and squadrons of fighter aircraft ready to shoot them down over the Channel or in areas where they could do little damage. Soon after the first V1 raid in June Herbert Morrison, Minister of Home Security, announced that damage had been slight, but warned people to keep under cover when they heard a V1 coming.

Goebbels's account of the first days of the V1 was one of his propaganda masterpieces. To cheer up the Germans and make them think that the Allied invasion was bound to fail, he painted lurid pictures of the enormous damage done by flying bombs, and even claimed that the British Government was clearing the whole civilian population out of London. That was a figment of his imagination, though in fact about 200,000 mothers and children were evacuated to safe areas out of the V1's range.

The V1 was certainly a formidable weapon. It was jet-propelled, and its explosive power was equal to that of an ordinary bomb weighing a ton; and though our anti-aircraft gunners, aided by radar, shot many V1s down over the sea, the menace was not fully overcome until our armies had overrun the Continental launching-sites.

The total casualty-list caused by V1s in England was 6,184 dead and 17,081 severely injured. German records

found after the war showed that 8,564 flying bombs had been launched, but a thousand of these had crashed within a short distance of the launching-site.

The worst V1 disaster occurred in July, when the Guards Chapel at Wellington Barracks, London, was hit and destroyed while a parade service was in progress. Guards officers (including Lieut.-Colonel Lord Edward Hay, a Grenadier Guards battalion commander), Guardsmen, Wrens, Waafs, A.T.S. girls and civilians were among the many who lost their lives. In contrast, there was only one fatal casualty when a V1 fell on the Regent Palace Hotel, and none at all when Dulwich College was hit.

But the V1 was not the only distraction from the great battle in France. Dramatic news came from Germany. A group of high army officers, conscious that Hitler was leading his country to ruin, had planned an attempt on his life. If it had been successful they had intended to seize control of the State in the name of the Army and to open armistice negotiations with either Eisenhower or Stalin.

The plotters had prepared several earlier schemes to assassinate Hitler, but none had actually been carried out. This time a Colonel von Stauffenberg placed a time-bomb concealed in a brief-case under a table during a conference at Hitler's headquarters, and then made an excuse for leaving the room as the bomb was due to explode. If this conference had been held in Hitler's usual meeting-room—a concrete air-raid shelter—the blast from the bomb would have killed Hitler and everyone else in the room. But the shelter was being repaired, and so the conference had been transferred to a wooden hut where the effects were less dangerous.

Even so, Hitler only just escaped with his life. He was leaning over the table when the bomb went off,

and this must have given him some protection. His leg was burnt by the explosion, his hair was scorched, his arm was hurt, his back was bruised by a falling beam and both ear-drums were damaged. People who had been sitting near him were either killed or gravely wounded.

The plotters had intended to cut the telephone communications with Hitler's headquarters. This plan miscarried, and soon the German radio was putting out the sensational news broadcast: "*Achtung!* We are broadcasting an important announcement. An attempt to murder the *Fuehrer* has been made. The *Fuehrer* himself is not hurt."

Later that day Hitler himself came to the microphone, to denounce the plot on his life as " a crime unparalleled in German history " and to say vaingloriously: " It has again been granted that I should escape a fate which would have been terrible, not for me, but for the German people." Goering and Admiral Doenitz also broadcast their gratitude for his escape.

Punishment followed swiftly. Some of the officers who had been detailed to seize the Army headquarters in Berlin were arrested that evening, together with von Stauffenberg. He and three others were shot at once, but the other leading conspirators were brought to trial at a Court of Honour. A Field-Marshal—von Witzleben—and three generals who had been deeply involved in the plot were sentenced to death at the Court's first sitting; they were killed by slow hanging, and a film of their executions was made and shown to Hitler. The Court's hearings and the Army purge continued for months; about 5,000 officers are known to have been executed, and many others were sentenced to internment in concentration camps.

That was not all. As the investigations continued,

Hitler discovered that Rommel, too, had been concerned in the plot, though by chance he was not able to take an active part on July 20. Since D-Day Rommel had been commanding an army group in France, and on July 17 he was badly wounded when his car was attacked by British fighters. He was thus in hospital on the day of the explosion.

In October, when he had gradually recovered from his wounds, Hitler offered him the choice between suicide and public trial. Rommel chose suicide, and it was publicly announced that he had died from his wounds. He was given a State funeral, at which Hitler was represented by von Rundstedt. The other conspirators could be openly exposed, but Hitler did not want the world to know that his favourite general had deserted him at this critical time.

Stalin had kept his promise to mount a big Red Army offensive to coincide with the D-Day landings. That summer the Russians recaptured Minsk, cleared the approaches to Vilna and Kaunas, and drew near to the borders of East Prussia. When the Polish city of Lublin fell into Soviet hands on July 24 the Soviet Government said that it had " no intention of establishing on the territory of Poland its own administrative organs, considering this a concern of the Polish people ". Yet already Russia was backing its own puppet Polish Government—the Polish Committee of National Liberation—against the legitimate exiled Polish Government in London.

In Italy both the Fifth and Eighth Armies continued to advance after the fall of Rome, and by mid-July the Fifth had captured Leghorn. The Eighth, too, drove forward up the centre of Italy, but was halted at Trasimene, where Kesselring had regrouped his retreating armies on a new defence line.

This was the beginning of a long period of frustration on the Italian front. Alexander had been ordered to give up seven divisions for the coming attack on the south of France. His depleted armies still fought gallantly, but for a long time they had neither the strength nor the numbers needed to drive the Germans out of Italy.

This July King George VI visited the Italian front. It was a great day for the Indian troops when the King-Emperor, wearing an open-necked shirt and shorts, himself conferred the Victoria Cross on nineteen-year-old Sepoy Kamal Ram, of the 8th Punjab Regiment, who was the youngest soldier in the Indian Army to receive this honour during the war. During the fighting in May Ram had volunteered to silence four enemy machine-gun posts. He overcame two by himself and then joined in attacking a third. His V.C. was awarded for " courage, initiative and disregard for personal risk ".

In Britain everyone was asking the same question: "When will the big push start in France? " There was not long to wait. After a few weeks of building up the bridgehead the way was clear for an advance on the American wing of the beachhead front. On July 25 Bradley broke through the German lines at St. Lo.

This was the beginning of a great sweep forward, which pivoted on the firm stand of the British and Canadians, who were holding the Germans back at the Caen end of the front. Patton, who was commanding the U.S. Third Army, was in his element as the drive gained momentum. One corps of Patton's Army drove into Brittany and captured Rennes; another swung round eastwards towards Paris and the Seine.

Hitler watched these developments with growing alarm. He had already sacked von Rundstedt and made Kluge Commander-in-Chief in the West. Now he

ordered von Kluge to try to cut off the Americans by striking west from Falaise.

It was a foolhardy venture. The Canadian Army, the British Second Army and General Hodges's U.S. First Army closed on the gap where the Germans were seeking to break through. The Battle of the Falaise Gap ended with complete Allied victory and an immense German death-roll. Hitler's rash project had cost him eight divisions.

The advance went on. By August 10 Patton had reached Chartres; a week later he was only 23 miles from Paris. Now came the news that yet another front had been opened, though at the cost of cutting down the Allied strength in Italy.

On August 15 the Franco-American Seventh Army landed in southern France between Cannes and Hyères. The new invaders met little serious resistance, since most of the Germans in that area had been sent north to join the Normandy fighting.

Their advance, in the face of such light opposition, was rapid and spectacular. In a fortnight they had passed Grenoble; in less than three weeks they were in Lyons; and a week later they were far enough north to join up with the Normandy armies, which were then driving east from Paris. It must remain doubtful whether this second invasion of France had any real effect on the course of the war. Churchill's plan for a landing in northern Italy or in the Balkans would almost certainly have had more immediate and profitable results.

While the Seventh Army was moving north Patton had crossed the Seine and his tanks had begun to encircle Paris. This was Eisenhower's plan. He wished at all costs to avoid a direct attack on Paris. He was helped by the French resistance forces inside the city,

who gave the Allies their "fifth column" by rising in revolt and capturing important Government buildings.

The honour of being the first Allied troops to enter Paris was reserved for the Fighting French, those loyal Frenchmen who had rallied in 1940 under de Gaulle's banner of Free France. One of de Gaulle's followers, General LeClerc, was in command of the French 2nd Armoured Division, which had landed in Normandy on August 1 and had since been attached to Patton's U.S. Third Army. On August 24 LeClerc sent his first detachments into Paris. On the next day the whole division followed and took up positions on both banks of the Seine. The German garrison was too weak to resist the Allies' entry. Its commander was captured in his own headquarters, and at 4 p.m. on August 25 he formally signed his garrison's capitulation.

Paris was free again. That very evening de Gaulle entered the city. Tumultuous crowds greeted him at the Hôtel de Ville, and again on the following day when he walked on foot with his troops down the Champs-Elysées to the Place de la Concorde. Though there were still Germans in France, the first tremendous act in the drama of European liberation had come to an end.

When so much had happened in less than three months from D-Day, many people in Allied countries thought that the war was virtually over. Montgomery himself said to his troops: "The end of the war is in sight. Let us finish off the business in record time." But it was not so easy as that. Hitler's generals—and Hitler's soldiers—were soon to show that the Allies would have to fight hard for final victory.

CHAPTER XIX

FREEDOM REBORN

For three weeks after the liberation of Paris Britain had only good news from the Western Front. There were dark clouds in the East, where the Polish resistance force in Warsaw had risen in revolt and was waiting desperately for relief by the advancing Soviet armies. But at home the approaching end of the war seemed to be signalised already by the lifting of many war-time restrictions.

The black-out was substantially eased, and was replaced by new forms of public lighting known as "dim-out" or "moonlight". More trains were promised, and people began to look forward to a time when long-distance travel would not be as overcrowded and uncomfortable as it had been since 1940. The Air Ministry went so far as to suspend new enrolments for the W.A.A.F.

In October Dover celebrated the end of four harassing years in which it had been frequently shelled from gun-sites across the Channel. Other Channel ports had suffered, too, but Dover had had the worst of it with a total of 2,226 shells which had killed 107 people. A month later the Home Guard was formally "stood down": from its small but enthusiastic beginnings in 1940 it had grown into a great force of 1,700,000 men, who, among other duties, had manned anti-aircraft guns and coastal defences.

Minor pleasures of this period were the lifting of the

ban on the manufacture of ice-cream, which had been restricted in 1940 and totally prohibited since 1942, and the issue of an official order allowing aluminium pots and pans to be made again. But there were still plenty of shortages. Children's clothes were particularly scarce, and the supply of sheets was only enough to allow one household in ten to buy a pair each year. The Government now announced plans for the return of workers from war factories to the clothing trade.

In September the Government produced the most eagerly awaited of all its post-war plans. This was the new social insurance programme based on the Beveridge Report. A comprehensive system of family allowances, retirement pensions, widows' pensions and other benefits and allowances was put forward as the Coalition Government's policy for post-war Britain. As it turned out, Churchill had no chance of carrying this programme through. It was left to the Labour Party, which won the General Election of 1945, to give Britain a new social insurance system.

Though these few weeks were halcyon days for most of Britain, London and the south were again suffering from Hitler's malignity. Early in September, when the V1 launching sites were being overrun by the Allied armies, Goebbels announced that the V2 was ready. This was the long-range rocket missile fired at Britain from sites in Holland, mostly near The Hague. Unlike the V1, the V2 gave no warning of its approach.

The first V2 was sent over on September 8. This "secret weapon" continued to menace Britain for seven months, for it was not until the Spring of 1945 that The Hague was liberated. In all, about 1,200 V2s were fired at Britain, and about 500 of them hit London. They killed 2,724 people and seriously injured 6,476.

An important change in the command of the Allied

expeditionary armies was announced at the beginning of September. In the early stage of the invasion of France, Eisenhower had been concerned with overall planning and had not personally directed the fighting armies. He now went to France as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force. Montgomery, who had previously acted as Eisenhower's deputy for field operations and had been in command on the whole front, was now to command only the British and Commonwealth forces; Bradley, the American general, was to command the American forces and to rank as Montgomery's equal.

It was revealed after the war—and, of course, was known to many people at the time—that there were big differences of opinion over strategy between Montgomery and Eisenhower. Montgomery favoured the concentration of Allied power in one tremendous thrust towards the Ruhr or the Saar, and maintained that such a thrust might have carried the expeditionary armies straight through to Berlin. Eisenhower preferred a general advance on a broad front.

As Supreme Commander Eisenhower naturally had his way, and it is difficult to say what might or might not have happened if Montgomery's plans had been fully carried out. It is at least arguable that the war might have been over much sooner, and that the Western Allies might have beaten Russia in the race for Berlin, with important results for the future of Eastern Europe. For it took the Red Army a very long time to cover the last fifty miles in its advance to Berlin.

Patton's Third Army continued its dash through France after Paris was freed. Soon it had crossed the Somme, and was pushing on towards Germany. But now the other Allied armies were advancing rapidly, too. Montgomery's army group, consisting of the British

Second Army and the Canadian First Army, was no longer obliged to act as pivot for the Americans swinging round on its right, and was given the happy task of liberating Belgium.

The Belgians gave their liberators a rapturous welcome. As the Germans retreated before the Allied advance, patriotic placards, posters, streamers and flags suddenly appeared from nowhere to decorate the streets. The Guards Armoured Division, which entered Brussels on September 3, had to make its way into the city through milling crowds of laughing and shouting men and women, almost as though it had been a football team bringing the F.A. Cup back to its home town.

On the following day the 11th Armoured Division reached Antwerp, making its final dash so quickly that the Germans had no time to destroy the docks before they retreated. This Division had a wonderful record in these months. It landed in France a week after D-Day, and of the next 134 days there were only five on which it was not in contact with the enemy.

The freeing of Belgium created at once one of those awkward problems which liberation so often brought in its train. The exiled Belgian Government returned to Brussels, and all Belgium wondered what should be done about King Leopold, who had surrendered to the Germans, had made no attempt to escape with his Government and had stayed in his palace at Laeken under Nazi occupation.

The problem was temporarily shelved by the appointment of Prince Charles, Leopold's popular and able younger brother, as Regent. But this was not a permanent solution. Charles did not wish to be Regent all his life, and Leopold, though living out of the country, still maintained his claim to the Belgian Throne. In the end, when a plebiscite showed that the bulk of the people

did not want him back, he gave up the Throne in favour of his son, who became King Baudouin.

The pursuit of the Germans went on through France and Belgium, and Hodges's First Army reached the Siegfried Line—the Germans' own answer to the ill-fated Maginot Line. But just as this broad advance by four armies seemed likely to take the Allies into Germany, a daring stroke by an Anglo-American airborne force ended in unexpected disaster.

The Allied high command feared that the invading armies might lose the initiative unless they could get through on the Germans' flank, for von Kluge had now checked the pace of his retreat and had drawn up his forces on a moderately strong defensive line. A surprise attack was therefore planned. Three airborne divisions were to be dropped in Holland behind the German defences. These divisions were assigned the task of seizing bridges and opening a corridor into Holland, so that the British Second Army could advance, cut the country in two and establish itself beyond the Rhine.

Two of the airborne divisions were American, one was British, under the command of Major-General R. E. Urquhart. The Americans were given landing-points near Eindhoven and Nijmegen; the British landing-point was on the far side of the lower Rhine, west of Arnhem.

At first all appeared to go well. Bombers paved the way for the airborne armada, which was escorted by more than 1,200 fighter aircraft. On September 16 all Britain was elated to read in the papers that a huge Allied air army was opening the way to the Rhine. A spokesman at Shaef (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) said cheerfully: "The airborne invasion of Holland is only a foretaste of what Allied air power can do."

Those first impressions were deceptive. The venture was ill-starred. Everything seemed to be against it, and it was particularly unlucky that General Model, one of the German army group commanders on the Western Front, happened to be at his tactical headquarters near Arnhem on the very day when the airborne landing took place.

Model was one of the cleverest of the German generals. His presence on the scene of action allowed him to take instant counter-measures to defeat the Allies' plans.

The American divisions met with comparatively little opposition in the Nijmegen-Eindhoven area and were able to open the first sector of the corridor into Holland; but the British, who were dropped at the furthest point of the attack, were soon in desperate straits near Arnhem, where Model personally directed the operations against them. Three reasons for this division's unfortunate failure were given later by Major-General Urquhart: Because of heavy anti-aircraft fire the paratroops had been dropped eight miles away from Arnhem instead of landing immediately on top of their objective; they had been dropped in three separate lifts instead of simultaneously, thus placing a particularly heavy responsibility on those who landed first; and the German opposition was much tougher than had been expected.

In spite of the odds against them, the men of Arnhem put up a valiant fight which won the admiration of the free world. They were isolated all the time. The Second Army advanced to Nijmegen, but could not break through to join up with the British paratroops. With rapidly dwindling forces Urquhart and his men held out until September 25, when their venture had to be written off as a failure. Those who survived and were

not taken prisoner were able to slip through a gap in the enemy lines and be ferried over the river to join the Second Army. Of the 10,000 who had taken part in the Arnhem landing, only a little more than 2,000 escaped to safety. Yet if Arnhem had "come off" it would have been a master-stroke which would surely have shortened the war. The men who fought this tragic losing battle will not be forgotten in the history of the British Army.

The Arnhem episode marked a temporary pause in the advance in the West. In the East, Russia still maintained her offensive and had captured Tallinn, the capital of Esthonia. But further south on the Russian front a grim drama was being unfolded in Warsaw, the Polish capital, which had already suffered so much both in the first months of the war and under the Nazi occupation.

Since the overrunning of Poland by Germany and Russia in 1939 a powerful Polish resistance movement had been built up in secret under the command of General Bor-Komorowski, who was usually known as General Bor. By the summer of 1944 he had 40,000 men behind him, with enough reserves of food and ammunition to keep them going for several days. They were ready to rise in revolt when the right moment came.

At the end of July the Russians seemed to have Warsaw well within their grasp. When Bor heard that they were beginning a general attack to liberate the city he at once ordered the uprising of his resistance movement. He was encouraged to do so by the Moscow radio, which told the Polish loyalists that the guns of liberation were within hearing and urged them to begin a "direct and active" struggle within the city.

Bor was a loyal supporter of the exiled Polish Government in London. But though the Prime Minister of

this Government, Mikolajczyk, had been to Moscow for talks during July, the Russians had already given their favour to the Communists of the rival Polish Committee of National Liberation. Bor was not a Communist. He was on the wrong side.

The Poles in Warsaw duly rose against the Germans, but the Soviet armies, commanded in this sector by Marshal Rokossovsky, did not advance to relieve them. For months the Red Army had been pushing back the Germans all along the front. Now, outside Warsaw, it suddenly and inexplicably halted.

Possibly—but only possibly—the Russian advance was held up by greater German strength or because the Soviet lines of communication were stretched too far. Yet Stalin's refusal to send air supplies to the Warsaw insurgents, or to give Western air forces landing-grounds on the Eastern front for flying arms and food into the city, gave rise to more sinister suspicions. It seemed that the Russians, after encouraging the Poles to rise in revolt, were now deliberately leaving them to their fate.

Bor and his followers fought the Germans tenaciously, but they were clearly doomed unless the Russians quickly relieved Warsaw. The Russians made no move. Weeks went by, and still Rokossovsky withheld the order to advance. In a last despairing broadcast the Polish patriots said bitterly that they had been "treated worse than Hitler's satellites, worse than Italy, Rumania and Finland".

That was the plain truth. In October they had to surrender to the Germans after fearful loss of life. The Soviet armies, which had been in striking distance for so long, did not enter Warsaw until three months later. When they did so there was no effective resistance movement. The Polish loyalists were either dead or

taken prisoner. The way was clear for the Communists in the Polish Committee of National Liberation to take over the country.

The horror of Warsaw was not the only tragedy of liberation. Another was to be played out in Greece before 1944 ended. But the Greek tragedy, though it caused much loss of life, had at least a happier ending

Britain and Greece have a long tradition of friendship, and though our attempts to protect Greece and Crete in 1941 had failed lamentably, Greek liberation had a high priority in the Allied war plans. In the summer of 1944 it seemed probable that Germany would cut down her commitments in the Balkans in view of the heavy offensives on other fronts and would be disinclined to open another battle-front on the Greek mainland. This surmise about probable German reactions was proved correct when British commando units landed at Patros, in southern Greece, in October. Within a few days the German garrison withdrew from Athens, and further British forces, under General Scobie, proceeded to liberate the whole country.

It had been arranged that the exiled Greek Government should return with Scobie. The return of King George of Greece was to be left for a later decision. Greek politics have always been complicated. If liberated Greece preferred a republic to a monarchy, she should be allowed a free choice. It was not for the British Government to impose on the Greeks a king whom they might not want.

The trouble in Greece turned on this very point of a free choice. The Greek resistance movement had been conducted by two organisations known by the initials of their Greek names—the E.A.M. (National Liberation Front) and the E.L.A.S. (People's National Army of Liberation). Both these organisations were controlled by

Communists, and their apparent intention was to seize power as soon as the country was freed.

Britain had no intention of handing Greece over to Communism. But although negotiations with the E.A.M. and E.L.A.S. had taken place before the British landings, and they had agreed that all guerilla forces should place themselves under Scobie's orders, the E.L.A.S. continued to keep up its military formations and was soon on the point of open revolt against the Greek Government. Early in December the Communists seized the Athens police stations and murdered most of the police officers they found there. Britain could not stand by and watch such a barbarous revolution. Churchill ordered Scobie to open fire on the insurgents and at the same time to inform the E.L.A.S. that it must evacuate Athens and give up its arms.

This Communist rising in Greece filled the British newspaper headlines for a fortnight. Some people in this country, and also in the United States, thought that it was wrong for British troops to maintain order against a Communist insurrection in a foreign country. Their theory was that Britain should leave Greece to work out her own destiny. In fact, this was what Britain intended to do, but only on the understanding that any election or plebiscite would be free and democratic. Experience of party-controlled elections elsewhere had shown that there would be little hope of a free vote if the Communists manned the polling-booths.

For many days British troops were engaged in fierce fighting in Athens, where the Communists had occupied most of the city. But more forces were diverted to Greece in the middle of December, and their arrival made it certain that the Communists would be beaten.

At Christmas Churchill (who had celebrated his 70th birthday on November 30) flew to Athens and discussed

the situation with the Greek Government and delegates from the E.L.A.S. It was then decided that the problem of the return of the Greek King should be shelved by the appointment (to which the King himself agreed) of Archbishop Damaskinos as Regent. This was an eminently satisfactory solution for the Greek people and the E.A.M. and E.L.A.S. accepted it; but some of the E.L.A.S. guerillas still held out and it was not until halfway through January, 1945, that the last of them were rounded up and were persuaded to sign the truce agreement.

The argument about the return of King George of Greece went on until 1946, when he was restored to the throne by a majority vote of his people. He died a year later and was succeeded by his brother, who became King Paul of Greece. It is curious that in all the Cyprus trouble of later years Greece showed little gratitude to Britain for having saved her from Communist rule.

Though the war in Italy had almost come to a standstill, owing to the Western Front's priority in claims for men and armour, good news was coming from many distant fronts. MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief, South-West Pacific, crowned his other successes by returning in force to the Philippines. American troops landed there on Leyte Island on October 20 and quickly established a bridgehead. The Japanese Navy unwisely decided to intervene in order to check further landings, and after a fierce encounter which lasted five days it was utterly routed by the United States Navy (under the command of Admiral Halsey) in the Battle of Leyte Gulf—a naval battle fought more from the air than with the warships' guns.

In this shattering defeat Japan lost three battleships, four aircraft-carriers, thirteen cruisers, nine destroyers and a submarine, while the American losses consisted

only of three aircraft-carriers, three destroyers and a submarine. Though heavy fighting had still to be undergone, this great American victory ended Japanese claims to control the Pacific. MacArthur poured 250,000 U.S. troops into the Philippines, and by December there was no doubt that his victory was assured.

The Japanese were also on the defensive in Burma. That front was "forgotten" no longer, and Slim's Fourteenth Army was no longer a "forgotten army". It was now recognised that this army, which Slim had been building up into a wonderful fighting force, was holding the biggest single front against Japan. Slim himself was rapidly becoming one of Britain's war heroes.

But there were shocks to come in Europe before the end of the year. In Eastern Europe there were already signs of the changes that Russia was soon to impose on the Balkan countries.

One by one, Hitler's Balkan "satellites" were breaking away from him. King Michael of Rumania proclaimed that his country was no longer at war with the Allied Powers, and so paved the way for the Red Army's occupation of Rumanian territory.

The Bulgarians, too, had had enough. King Boris of Bulgaria had died in 1943, and three Regents—including the late King's brother, Prince Cyril—took control of the country. In September, 1944, the Regents were forced to resign, and the new Government, in which Communists were included for the first time, sent a delegation to make terms with Russia. Here also the Red Army moved in, and Soviet administrators began a ruthless purge of all who were said to have collaborated with Germany. Prince Cyril and the two other ex-Regents were among 100 "war criminals" who were executed after the first of the European war crimes trials in Sofia in February, 1945.

Though Yugoslavia and Hungary were not yet entirely freed from German occupation, the Russians entered Belgrade in October, 1944, and other Soviet forces began a long battle for Budapest. Further north, the Red Army was steadily advancing into East Prussia. Himmler, the Gestapo chief, who had also been appointed Commander-in-Chief of Germany's Home Armies after the attempt on Hitler's life, reduced the call-up age to 16, and ordered all males from 16 to 60 who were not in the Services to enrol at once in the People's Storm Troops—the belated German equivalent of the Home Guard.

In spite of the disaster of Arnhem hopes were high again in Britain. It was known that our old and formidable enemy, Rommel, was dead, though the real truth about his death was not disclosed. In October and November Montgomery cleared the Germans out of South Beveland and Walcheren island, where they had been able to command the seaward approaches to Antwerp and so had made the port unusable for our shipping. The land fighting involved in these operations was carried out by the Canadians, who had to fight the Germans from ditch to ditch in order to capture the vital port of Breskens and the coastal batteries near by. In doing so, they took 12,700 prisoners. Other Canadians fought equally gallantly to seize the Beveland peninsula, and in the final stage of the operation a daring commando raid by Royal Marines, assisted by French and Dutch troops, gave us a foothold on Walcheren island, in spite of the heavy fire from shore defences which greeted the raiders. The commando assault had settled Walcheren's fate. In a few days the Scheldt estuary was clear of Germans, but it was not until the end of November that all the mines were swept from the channel and the great port of Antwerp was open for Allied shipping.

Though the Beveland and Walcheren operations had taken three weeks to complete, all seemed to be going well on the Western Front. Hodges's U.S. First Army was only 27 miles from the Rhine. De Gaulle's French tanks had liberated Strasbourg. Lancaster bombers struck an effective blow behind the German lines by dropping "earthquake bombs" on the Dortmund-Ems canal, a vital life-line for the German armies. This canal had carried as much as 75,000,000 tons of war freight in a year. The Lancasters' raid put it out of action.

But Germany was by no means finished. Von Rundstedt had been reappointed Commander-in-Chief in the West, and he now had the responsibility for carrying out a great plan which Hitler himself had devised. This was a counter-offensive in the Ardennes, whereby Hitler hoped that the German armies would cross the Meuse, recapture Antwerp and cut off the British Second Army between the Meuse and the Rhine.

Von Rundstedt was given 26 divisions for the Ardennes attack, and six more were in readiness for a supplementary thrust into Alsace. Hitler, who had now taken up his own headquarters in Western Germany at Bad Nauheim, called all the Western Front commanders to a conference and outlined his plans in a two-hour speech which included a general review of the war. One of those present said afterwards that Hitler's hands were shaking, and that he looked old and broken.

The Ardennes offensive began on December 16. It took the Allies completely by surprise. In one sector of the Western Front Bradley, the American army group commander, had only five divisions spread out over 100 miles. It was here that von Rundstedt struck with a great concentration of men and armour.

For nine days the British public was dismayed by newspaper headlines recounting von Rundstedt's initial

success. German tanks rolled back into Belgium, recaptured Malmédy and soon were 35 miles inside the Belgian frontier. The German advance was made easier by the activities of their commandos, led by Otto Skorzeny, the man who had rescued Mussolini. Many scores of these commandos slipped behind the Allied lines at the beginning of the offensive, and committed all kinds of acts of sabotage to upset the American plans for meeting the attack.

Each day the war maps showed the Allied line being pushed further and further back by a huge German salient. That Christmas was the coldest in Britain since 1890, and there was nothing to warm British hearts in the news that von Rundstedt was only four miles away from the Meuse.

Yet Hitler's last gamble was always doomed to failure. He was using up vital reserves in an offensive which never had any real chance of taking the Germans to Antwerp. He had given von Rundstedt big land forces, but the Allies were greatly superior in the air, and Hitler, of all people, should have known that air superiority was essential for a successful land offensive.

Though Hodges's U.S. First Army was driven a long way back, it resisted stubbornly and was able to hold out until help came on both flanks. Soon Patton attacked the German salient from the south, and Montgomery moved against it from the north.

The end was in sight. Von Rundstedt's advance was forced to a standstill, and then was turned into a retreat. The battle went on until mid-January, but the issue was settled before the end of December. Britain began 1945 with complete confidence that this would be the last year of the war.

CHAPTER XX

OVER THE RHINE

On New Year's Day, 1945, Roosevelt began his thirteenth year as President of the United States. He had been re-elected in the previous November for his fourth term of office, and at the same time Senator Harry S. Truman had been elected Vice-President. Few people in Britain had ever heard of Senator Truman, and little notice was taken of his election.

Hitler began 1945 in apparently confident mood. With all the evidence against him he told the German people on New Year's Day that they were winning the war. Even at the end of January he still declared: "We fight on till victory. Whoever stabs us in the back will die."

By that time a new Russian offensive had begun. Half-way through January the Soviet Marshal Koniev broke through the German defences in Poland and threatened Cracow, while Marshal Zhukov began a simultaneous attack in the Warsaw area. Both these Polish cities fell in a few days.

Warsaw, where Bor and his resistance troops had fought so bravely, was a dead city when the Russians relieved it at last. Its liberation drew new attention to the split between the exiled Polish Government in London and the Polish Committee of National Liberation supported by Russia. The Polish Government quoted one of the last messages received from Bor at the end of his 63 days' struggle against the Germans. He had proclaimed: "We are fighting for freedom. We are

fighting for the right to be free." The exiled Poles appealed to Russia to give their country freedom. They already foresaw the Iron Curtain that Russia was to bring down between Eastern Europe and the Western world.

From Warsaw and Cracow Koniev and Zhukov carried their double offensive through Poland in to Germany itself. It almost seemed as though the two Soviet Marshals were engaged in a race to finish the war on the Eastern front. One day brought news that Koniev had reached Germany's frontier. Three days later he was 20 miles beyond it, and Zhukov was only 165 miles from Berlin. Koniev crossed the Oder. Zhukov drew near to the same river. At the end of three brilliant weeks he was within 50 miles of Berlin and was still advancing.

The Western Front was comparatively quiet for a week or two between the collapse of von Rundstedt's Ardennes attack and the beginning of Montgomery's big offensive. It was in this period of minor operations that Lance-Corporal H. E. Harden, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, performed the gallant deeds which won him, after his death, the Victoria Cross—the first to be awarded to a member of the R.A.M.C. during the war.

A Royal Marine commando troop had been ordered to take cover from intense German machine-gun fire, and had had to leave a wounded officer and three "other ranks" lying in the open. Harden went forward under a hail of fire, coolly attended to the wounded and then carried one of them back to safety. Though ordered not to go out again, he insisted on doing so, and rescued another of the wounded men. He made yet a third journey to rescue the officer, but was killed himself on the way back. The announcement of his V.C. said: "His magnificent example was an inspiration and will never be forgotten by those who saw it."

Montgomery's offensive began in the second week of February. His army group had been enlarged, so that he commanded the U.S. First and Ninth Armies as well as the British Second Army and the Canadian First Army. Eisenhower's plan was that Montgomery should make the main drive north of the Ruhr and into the north German plain, while Bradley, commanding the other big army group, should advance in the Mainz-Frankfurt area. The Ruhr, which was still the principal centre of German arms production, would thus be caught between two Allied armies. When they had overrun it, they could continue with a great thrust across Germany to link up with the Russians.

Eisenhower and Montgomery had expected that the Germans would withdraw across the Rhine and use the river as their defence-line. Von Rundstedt decided differently. He took the risk of trying to hold up the Allied advance west of the Rhine, and put up a fierce resistance in the first phase of the new offensive. A fortnight's stiff fighting followed, and Britain could only wait as patiently as possible for the day when von Rundstedt would have to retreat again in face of the Allies' irresistible strength.

It was easier to be patient then than at most other times in the war. Though V2s were still falling in London and the south of England, and occasional " tip and run " German raiders dropped bombs on East Anglia and other parts of the country, life in Britain was slowly but surely moving away from the rigid austerity of wartime rules and regulations. Even bread was becoming whiter again, as the Food Ministry announced successive alterations in the extraction rate of wheat. It was also possible—though certainly not permissible—to take a day trip to the Continent: two young women who flew to Brussels and back in an American trans-

port plane were fined £50 each for their jaunt abroad. People were beginning to look forward to a normal summer, but tennis and golf enthusiasts were handicapped by the fact that no new tennis or golf balls had been made in Britain since a ban was imposed on their manufacture in 1942. Fire guard duties had already been dropped in many areas, and before March was out they were suspended all over the country.

Everywhere men and women were thinking more and more deeply about what should be done "after the war". It was painfully clear that the immediate post-war period would be a very difficult one. All the liberated or partly liberated countries were in trouble. Economic breakdown and starvation were threatened in France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia. The position was complicated in most of these countries by the presence of large numbers of refugees or displaced persons who had lost their pre-war homes. It was to meet this critical situation that the Allied Powers had set up a new organisation, UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Recovery Association, which did much humane and valuable work at the end of the war and in the early post-war years.

Interest in post-war problems was further stimulated by the report of another conference between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin. They met in February at the Crimean seaside resort of Yalta, and there agreed that Nazism and German militarism must be finally destroyed after the war. For the war itself they still maintained their policy of "unconditional surrender".

The Yalta agreement has been much criticised on the ground that it left Russia with a free hand in Eastern Europe, thus producing the enforced Communisation of the Balkans, the Iron Curtain and the "cold war". In fact, Stalin gave his personal pledge that Russia

would assist " the peoples of the Axis satellite States to create democratic institutions of their own choice ". His war-time Allies could not know—though even then, perhaps, they could guess—how this pledge would eventually be interpreted by Russia.

It was not long before Russia gave clear indications of the policies she intended to pursue. Within a few days of the signing of the Yalta agreement the Soviet envoy in Bucharest gave an ultimatum to King Michael of Rumania, who had done the Allies a good turn in 1944 by bringing his country over to their side. King Michael was now brusquely ordered to change his Government and to install a Communist as Prime Minister. Yet even before this ominous move was made, many friends of Poland had begun to wonder if Britain and the United States had unintentionally sold that unfortunate country " down the river ".

The Yalta settlement provided that the new Polish Government should consist of members of the Communist Polish Committee of National Liberation and representatives of other Polish parties drawn from inside and outside the country; but many doubted whether Stalin could be trusted to give a fair deal to the exiled Polish Government with which he had been so much in conflict. In Britain 21 Conservative M.P.s felt so strongly about this matter that they challenged a division in the House of Commons when Churchill gave his report on Yalta.

They lost, of course. Churchill then believed that Stalin would keep his word, and he carried the House of Commons with him. He told M.P.s that he was convinced that " Marshal Stalin and the Soviet leaders wish to live in honourable friendship and equality with the Western democracies " and that he felt sure that " their word is their bond ". (No one, apparently, reminded him

of Lord Dewar's epigram: "If a man says his word is as good as his bond, take the bond!") When the vote was taken, Churchill's report was approved by 396 votes to 25. The minority had not long to wait before it was proved to be right.

Other warning pointers to post-war trouble were beginning to come from the Far East. Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese generalissimo, who was still holding out against the Japanese in China, was not an easy man for the West to deal with, and he was no longer in complete control even of those parts of China which were free of the invaders. Chinese Communists were becoming strongly consolidated in the north-west of the country, where their leader, General Mao Tse-tung, was said to have 600,000 soldiers under his command. Some British people were optimistic enough to believe that Chinese Communists were not real Communists, but the danger of China's "going Red" after the war was clearly becoming acute.

Chiang was receiving valuable help from Lord Louis Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command, which had re-opened the so-called "Burma road", by which arms and other supplies could be sent through Burma to China. At the same time the Fourteenth Army was keeping up its advance in central Burma.

Everywhere Japan was being pushed back from the vast territories she had overrun when she entered the war. In January MacArthur made a further landing in the Philippines. Big American forces went ashore on Luzon and began to threaten Manila. In February Manila was captured, and after three days' intensive bombardment U.S. paratroops and ground forces stormed and took Corregidor.

In their own homeland, too, the Japanese were feeling the effects of war most unpleasantly. The United States

Navy now had virtual command of Far Eastern waters, and Tokyo was subjected to heavy raids by carrier-borne aircraft. The United States intended to keep up this bombing until Japan surrendered, but in the end it was a different kind of bomb which wound up the war in the Far East.

While so much was going on in so many parts of the world, one question above all others was being asked in Britain: How long would it be before Montgomery's offensive gained the momentum needed to carry it through to Berlin?

It was not long before the offensive was fully under way. While the British and Canadians were gradually overcoming the stubborn German resistance, the United States First and Ninth Armies were temporarily held up by the flooded river Roer. Before the end of February the flood waters subsided, the Americans crossed the Roer and were soon able to link up with the Canadians for a concerted advance.

Von Rundstedt's position was hopeless. Churchill went out to see the Western Front for himself and came back with the encouraging news: "Anyone can see that one good heave all together will end the war in Europe." The heave took a little longer than most people expected, partly because of the strength of German resistance and partly because Eisenhower's policy of advancing on a broad front deprived Montgomery of the supplies he needed to maintain an all-out offensive. For although Montgomery was making the principal thrust into Germany, Bradley's American army group was advancing too, and much-needed supplies were being diverted for Patton's spectacular—but probably quite unnecessary—race into Germany on the right of the battle-line.

Early in March the Germans were finally and irrevoc-

ably " on the run ". In their retreat they destroyed the Rhine bridges, and when Hodges's U.S. First Army captured Cologne on March 5 there was no bridge by which they could cross the river.

One of the armoured divisions of this army was luckier. It reached the Rhine town of Remagen on March 7 and was surprised to find that the Ludendorff railway bridge over the river was still intact. Apparently the Germans had timed its destruction for four o'clock in the afternoon, and the Americans had arrived before they were expected.

Some German defenders were still at the far end of the bridge, but American troops raced across and overpowered them. One or two of the explosive charges under the bridge went off a few minutes later, but the main charge did not explode. The bridge was captured and held secure. The Allies were over the Rhine. Now nothing could stop their advance.

A second bridgehead followed the first a fortnight later. Patton's Third Army crossed the Moselle on March 16 and reached the Rhine between Coblenz and Mannheim. Though there was no bridge available Patton sent six battalions across the river at Oppenheim and quickly erected a treadway bridge that would bear the weight of his tanks. The Allied High Command was almost as surprised as the Germans were at this successful crossing.

This was the beginning of Patton's amazing dash through Germany. He was not, it is true, facing any of the strongest German resistance, which was concentrated further north, and the main offensive would almost certainly have been more rapid if Montgomery had had the petrol supplies which were being diverted to Patton. Yet the speed of the Third Army's fantastic drive was unmatched in the war. Two or three days

after crossing the Rhine Patton was 70 miles beyond it. Then he pushed on so quickly that Allied Supreme Headquarters often lost touch with him for hours on end, until at last he sent a message back from some place it seemed impossible for him to have reached in the time.

At the end of March Patton congratulated his army on its wonderful fortnight. Since crossing the Moselle it had occupied 6,484 square miles of enemy territory, taken 140,000 prisoners, killed or wounded 99,000 other Germans and eliminated almost the entire German First and Second Armies. Perhaps it was not very modest of "Old Blood and Guts" to add: "History records no greater achievement in such a limited time." But as it stood, and ignoring the aetual effects of this diversionary move on the campaign as a whole, it was certainly an achievement of which he and his men could well be proud.

Meanwhile Montgomery had crossed the Rhine at Wesel—a stiffer task than Patton's, for the river there was twice as wide as it was at Oppenheim. British and American troops made the crossing on March 23 and held the bridgehead secure. Within three days engineers had constructed a dozen prefabricated bridges over the river. Montgomery's armies poured over the Rhine, ready to burst into the north German plain.

This vital phase of the attack was quickly followed by the complete liberation of Holland, which ended at last the discharge of V2s aimed at London from sites near The Hague. With vicious malice the Germans had kept up these attacks on civilians even when it was daily more clear that they had no hopes of military victory. In that very month of March, when the end of the war was so near, one V2 killed 110 people in Smithfield Market and another killed 131 in Stepney.

On the Western Front von Rundstedt was now finally discredited. Kesselring was brought from Italy to take command. But he had only a beaten army to lead. The Rhine crossing had sealed Germany's fate. Now, as her armies retreated deeper and deeper into their homeland both East and West, British people began to ask jubilantly: "Who will get to Berlin first—Zhukov or Monty?"

CHAPTER XXI

HOW IT ENDED

ZHUKOV won. In the middle of April his armies broke the German defences on the Oder and Neisse rivers and by April 21 they had reached the suburbs of Berlin. In the same month the Soviet general Tolbukhin entered Vienna after a week's hand-to-hand fighting in the city streets, and Koniev's army group was rapidly approaching Dresden. The long battle for Budapest had ended with Soviet victory earlier in the year.

Yet Montgomery could almost certainly have won the race to Berlin, if Eisenhower and Marshall, the United States Chief of Staff, had accepted Churchill's view that it was all-important for the Western Allies to get there first. Churchill believed that the British and Americans should advance as far into Germany as they could, in the hope of preventing Russia from getting a complete stranglehold on Eastern Europe. Eisenhower thought differently. He gave priority to Bradley's drive towards Dresden, and Montgomery's progress was inevitably slowed down.

One reason for directing the main Allied advance through the centre of Germany, instead of further north towards Berlin, was the rumour that Hitler was contemplating a final desperate stand in an "Alpine redoubt" near his own home of Berchtesgaden. The Americans feared that many Allied lives might be lost in subduing these last German armies.

In fact, Hitler never had any intention of holding out

in this mythical "redoubt". The whole rumour had been most successfully engineered by the German Secret Service. Hitler at that time was merely telling his generals to fight on, but he had no constructive plans to offer them.

So Bradley, who had taken back the United States Ninth Army from Montgomery's command, pressed on towards the Elbe, while Montgomery himself made a drive north-east towards the Baltic. On the right of the Allied advance the irrepressible Patton continued to sweep on, and by April 10 he was only two miles from Erfurt and 52 from the borders of Czechoslovakia.

Even now the Western Allies had still a chance of being first in Berlin. For on April 12 the Ninth Army crossed the Elbe, and was then well placed to march on Berlin, which was only 53 miles away. The chance was not taken. The Supreme Allied Command thought that the capture of Berlin was not worth the heavy casualties it might have involved. It preferred to conserve Allied strength to subdue the "Alpine redoubt".

Yet events in Italy should have shown the Supreme Command that there was no longer any danger of stiff German resistance. On the Italian front Alexander, who had been held back so long because the Western Front had had first claim on men and materials, at last ended a three months' stalemate. The Eighth Army, now commanded by General McCreery, crossed the Senio and Santerno rivers and drove northwards. The Fifth Army also attacked west of Bologna. This double offensive carried the two armies over the Po into north-west Italy, driving the Germans before them in full flight. Italian "partisans" rose in revolt against Mussolini's puppet dictatorship and seized Milan and Venice.

The Germans in Italy were beaten. Kesselring had

seen defeat coming even before he had left for the Western Front, and had made detailed plans for German surrender. His successor carried them out on April 29 and handed over nearly 1,000,000 German soldiers as prisoners of war. In spite of the many frustrations he had suffered, Alexander had won the Italian war.

While events in Europe were nearing their climax, the Allies lost one of the great architects of victory. Roosevelt died on April 12, and was deeply mourned in both Britain and the United States. In accordance with American constitutional procedure, he was succeeded by the Vice-President, Harry S. Truman, who at that time was hardly known outside his own country.

Truman had had an uneventful political career before being elected to the Vice-Presidency, which is not usually a post of great significance in the United States. It was unfortunate that Roosevelt had not taken Truman into his confidence about the higher strategy of the war, and it took the new President some time to appreciate all the problems that now confronted him. It did not take him long, however, to become disillusioned about the Russians. Years later, as an ex-President, Truman said that he still did not trust them, and he recalled that " they broke 32 agreements with me right after I became President ".

In this month of April, 1945, Britain was enthusiastically making plans for greeting the end of the war. The B.B.C. was preparing a whole week of victory programmes. The " dim-out " ended on April 22, and lighting was completely unrestricted for the first time for five years and eight months, though pre-war lighting standards could not at once be restored in trains and other public vehicles. Yet even now the Government would not allow the publication of weather reports.

World statesmen, too, were making their own plans

for the post-war world. A great World Security Conference was opened at San Francisco on April 23, attended by 1,000 delegates from 50 nations. The discussions went on for three months, and on June 26 the delegates signed the Charter of the post-war United Nations. It was widely hoped that this new organisation would be an effective guarantee of world peace.

It was also in this month of April that the advance of the Allied armies through Germany uncovered the worst horrors of Hitler's régime. The dreaded concentration camps—those ghastly prison settlements that Hitler first set up when he came to power in 1933—were at last thrown open in all their hideousness and inhumanity.

Originally the concentration camps were intended for Jews and all political opponents whom the Nazis regarded as "enemies of the Party and of the National State". When war began there were six camps, holding 20,000 prisoners. During the war Hitler and Himmler turned them into torture-chambers and slaughter-houses for Jews, Poles, other inhabitants of occupied territories and prisoners of war, including Allied commandos and brave men and women who parachuted into France to help the resistance movement and were taken prisoner by the Germans. A typical and tragic example of the Nazis' treatment of parachutists is the fate of two British girls who "dropped" in France to act as radio operators for the Special Operations Executive. These girls were caught by the Germans, tortured by the Gestapo and then sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, where they were executed.

The names of these camps—Belsen, Dachau, Buchenwald, Auschwitz and others—were grimly familiar long before their secrets were laid bare, but it was only when the Allied armies reached them that their full horrors were revealed. Half-way through April the British 11th

Armoured Division overran the Belsen camp on the Celle-Hamburg road, and found it full of starved, wasted, diseased and maltreated prisoners who were more dead than alive. Under the rule of a brutal commandant, Joseph Kramer—"the beast of Belsen"—thousands had perished in this camp from starvation and all kinds of disease.

Yet Belsen was not the worst. The Buchenwald camp was notorious as the testing-ground of revolting tortures, and a particularly horrible fate was reserved for tattooed prisoners who were brought there. They were killed by injections, and then their skin was removed, so that the commandant's wife, Ilse Koch, could use it for making lamp-shades, gloves and book-covers.

Most hideous of all was Auschwitz, the camp in a little Polish town 160 miles south-west of Warsaw. It was here that Hitler's fanatical plan for exterminating the Jews was carried out with frightful cruelty and inhumanity. At Auschwitz large batches of prisoners were taken into poison-gas chambers and murdered; their bodies were then heaped into pits and burnt. Other prisoners were savagely tortured or shot in the mass executions which took place every day. Between 1940 and 1945 from 3,000,000 to 3,500,000 people were murdered at Auschwitz. The gas chambers alone claimed 2,500,000 victims.

The story of the concentration camps is a terrible one. The men and women who were in charge of them were callous, bestial creatures, without any spark of humanity, and their subordinates were chosen from the dregs of the German nation. Above them all was Himmler, the ruthless Gestapo chief, who went delightedly from camp to camp and brought parties of friends to watch particularly nauseating tortures; and above Himmler was Hitler, who had created the camps

and given his appalling order for the extermination of the Jewish race.

The full extent of Hitler's murders will never be known. Yet apart from the hundreds of thousands of Allied prisoners and people of occupied lands who were brutally slaughtered, the total number of Jews killed by Himmler on Hitler's orders was not less than 5,000,000 and may have been as much as 6,000,000. The concentration camp revelations raised a question which has never been satisfactorily answered: How much did the ordinary German people know of these crimes that their own rulers were committing in their own country?

Though the Germans in Berlin were still holding out as best they could, the other war news from Germany in April, 1945, was only of steady and uninterrupted advance by the Allied armies. On April 25 the Allied pincers closed: American and Soviet soldiers met and shook hands at Torgau, on the Elbe. Germany was cut in two.

Three days later sensational news came from Italy. Mussolini was dead. Though his puppet State in North Italy was not yet completely overrun by Alexander's armies, Mussolini was captured and shot by Italian partisans on the shores of Lake Como. They also shot his mistress, Clara Petacci, who was with him. As a final mark of Italy's contempt for her ex-dictator, the two bodies were taken to Milan and hung head downwards on a gibbet in the Piazzale Loreto.

So one dictator had paid for his crimes. The other was still alive. Yet, as Germany reeled to defeat, there was nothing left for Hitler but death or surrender.

He chose death. In January he had moved his headquarters from Bad Nauheim, on the Western Front, to Berlin, where he rarely moved from the deep shelter reserved for himself and his personal staff underneath

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the Chancellery building. He was still there when the Russians reached the outskirts of Berlin and began to encircle the city.

Himmler, Goering, von Ribbentrop and others implored him to leave the capital. They pointed out that two German army groups were still intact, and even if Berlin fell Hitler could direct the war from the army headquarters at Obersalzberg.

Hitler would not go. He said that the others could go to Obersalzberg if they wished, but he himself was resolved to stay in Berlin. For a time he had a fantastic hope that Berlin might be relieved by a German army corps commanded by General Wenck; but when the city was completely encircled and hourly bombarded by Russian shells and bombs he made up his mind to die rather than be taken prisoner.

An unexpected event of these final days was the eclipse of Goering. In one of his outbursts in the Berlin shelter Hitler had said that he would give up the supreme command, since "if it comes to negotiating, the Reichsmarshal (Goering) can do it better than I can." When Goering was given this message at Obersalzberg, he at once telegraphed back, asking for confirmation that he was to take over the full leadership of Germany. Prompted by Martin Bormann, one of Goering's enemies among the Nazi leaders, Hitler decided that this was a treasonable suggestion (even though it originated from his own remark), and gave orders that Goering should be dismissed from all his offices.

Himmler, too, was exposed as a traitor to his *Fuehrer* in Nazi Germany's last days. On his own initiative he tried to negotiate peace terms through the Swedish Count Bernadotte, who had come to Germany to make arrangements for the release of Norwegian and Danish prisoners. Hitler was told of Himmler's overtures

to Bernadotte and expelled him from the Nazi Party.

Yet Hitler was not deserted by all his former friends. With him in the shelter was Eva Braun, who had been his mistress for twelve years, though their relationship had been managed so discreetly that the outside world knew little about it. She was an attractive blonde who had worked in a Bavarian photographer's shop before she met Hitler. She had now come to Berlin against Hitler's orders, and was fully resolved to die with him if he committed suicide.

Goebbels, too, the Minister of Propaganda and companion of Hitler's early days, was still faithful. He stayed with Hitler till the end, and was a witness at the marriage ceremony between Hitler and Eva Braun in the shelter on April 29. Various reasons have been put forward for this belated marriage. It is possible that Hitler had not wished to marry her before because he feared that marriage would make him seem less important in the eyes of the German people. If that was really the reason, it had obviously lost its significance when he was so near his death.

Before his suicide Hitler made his political " last will and testament ". Since Himmler and Goering were no longer in the running as possible successors, he chose Doenitz, who had been the U-boat expert and was now naval Commander-in-Chief, as the next *Fuehrer*. Then, in the afternoon of April 30, Hitler shot himself and Eva Braun took poison. By Hitler's orders given before his death both bodies were burnt in the Chancellery garden. Petrol was poured on the flames in such large quantities that the bodies were almost totally destroyed. Though bones may have remained, no one, as far as is known, has ever found them.

Goebbels followed his *Fuehrer*. He, his charming wife and their six children were all in a deep shelter close to

Hitler's. Goebbels resolved that none of them should live on when their *Fuehrer* was dead. With his wife's consent, he gave poison to the children and then shot himself and his wife. He, too, had given orders that his own and his wife's bodies should be burnt, but they were not completely destroyed. The Russians found and identified them when they completed the capture of Berlin and occupied the Chancellery on May 2.

Doenitz, after recovering from his utter amazement at being appointed *Fuehrer*, wildly proclaimed: "We fight on." He can hardly have meant it seriously.

For the Russians were in Berlin, and Montgomery's armies, which had crossed the Elbe near Luneburg, had reached the Danish borders and were driving north to the Baltic. They were undisputed masters of North-West Germany.

The German Army knew that it was beaten. On May 4 representatives of the German High Command went to Montgomery's headquarters on Luneburg Heath to ask for an armistice. A few hours later the Allied Supreme Headquarters announced: "Field-Marshal Montgomery has reported to the Supreme Allied Commander that all enemy forces in Holland, North-West Germany and Denmark, including Heligoland and the Friesian Islands, have surrendered to the 21st Army Group." More than 1,000,000 Germans surrendered on that day alone. The Germans in Norway followed suit when high British officers flew there to accept their capitulation.

Now the end of the war in Europe was a matter of hours or days. Doenitz quickly abandoned any idea of fighting on, and announced that he was ready to give in. His representatives went to the small red schoolhouse near Rheims which Eisenhower used as his headquarters. There, on May 7, 1945, they signed the

document recording the unconditional surrender of Germany.

It was all over. May 8 was hailed in Britain as VE-Day (Victory-in-Europe Day), and that day and the next were national holidays. Britain was glad—and entitled—to relax for two days of triumph and jubilation. One of the earliest pieces of post-war news was that petrol for private motoring would soon be available. Motorists began to think about putting their pre-war cars on the road again, and newspaper motoring correspondents, anxious to keep death off the roads, wrote warning articles on what should be done before bringing a laid-up car into use.

Yet there was still war in the Far East, and there was still the fear that the Japanese, out of fanatical loyalty to their Emperor, might put up a suicidal rearguard fight which, though certain to end in defeat, might cause heavy loss of life to both British and Americans. Perhaps there was not much basis for this fear. Japan was retreating everywhere, and Slim's Fourteenth Army had just crowned its brilliant Burma campaign by recapturing Rangoon on May 3.

As far back as February Prince Konoye, a respected Japanese elder statesman, had frankly told the Emperor that in his opinion Japan had lost the war. His view was confirmed by the successful American landing on Okinawa, a key island between Formosa and the Japanese mainland. The wisest men in Japan then knew that their best course was to get out of the war as quickly as possible.

In July the chief Allied statesmen—Churchill (who was still Prime Minister until the end of the month), Stalin and the new United States President, Truman—met at Potsdam, near Berlin, to discuss the post-war settlement and, in particular, the future of Germany.

While they were there Churchill, Truman and Chiang Kai-shek issued an ultimatum to Japan. (Stalin did not sign it, because Russia had not yet kept her promise to join in the Far Eastern war after the defeat of Germany.) This ultimatum called on the Japanese Government "to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurance of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction."

This was no idle threat. The atom bomb had arrived. Since 1941 British and American scientists had been working together on the production of a military weapon based on atomic energy. The first atom bomb was exploded in New Mexico, in the United States, on July 16, 1945. The reports of the explosion showed that the Western Allies had in their hands a more fearsomely destructive weapon than had ever been used in war.

Japan did not heed the Allies' warning. Britain and the United States decided to use the atom bomb against Japan in order to prevent the greater loss of life which would have been caused by prolonged war in the Far East. So on Monday, August 6, an American Superfortress bomber dropped on the little-known Japanese town of Hiroshima a bomb which had the force of 20,000 tons of ordinary explosive and was able to cause still more widespread damage by its radio-active effects.

The result was catastrophic. Japanese reports said that the whole city was destroyed instantly by a single bomb. This was not quite true, but the whole of the business centre was destroyed, and 78,100 of the city's 343,000 inhabitants were killed. In addition, 58,839 were seriously injured.

Yet Japan did not surrender. Three days later another atom bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. This time 37,501

people were killed and 51,580 injured. Now Japan knew that her situation was hopeless. It was useless to fight a rearguard action overseas if the Japanese mainland itself was to suffer the "utter destruction" foretold in the Potsdam ultimatum.

On August 15 the Emperor of Japan broadcast to the Japanese people. It was the first time that he had broadcast, and many of his subjects must have expected a rousing call to go on with the war. If so, they were disappointed. The Emperor began with the curt announcement: "We have ordered Our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provisions of their joint declaration." (Russia was now mentioned because she had hastily entered the war against Japan when she saw that it was nearly over.)

Japan, in fact, had agreed to surrender unconditionally. The Emperor's pledge was put into effect on September 2, when the United States battleship *Missouri* sailed into Tokyo Bay and Japanese delegates went on board to surrender to MacArthur. This was merely the "signing on the dotted line" of a surrender which had come into effect on August 15—just nine days after the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima.

Britain celebrated August 15 as VJ-Day (Victory-in-Japan Day). Strangely enough, it was not Churchill's privilege to lead the nation in rejoicing, for the Conservative Party, of which he was leader, had been defeated in the General Election held in July. The "pilot who had weathered the storm" was out of office. Attlee was Prime Minister at the head of a Labour Government.

The war ended in East and West. More than 300,000 British and Dominion soldiers and 250,000 Americans

had died to win it. Yet peace was not to bring the high hopes that had been set on it. Russia had a firm hold on all the countries of Eastern Europe and was soon to place an Iron Curtain between East and West. Before long the war-time Allies were to be ranged against each other in the "cold war" of peace.

When Mihailovic, the Yugoslav Royalist leader, was tried by a Yugoslav Court in 1946 and was condemned to death for having collaborated with the Germans against Tito, he said in his defence: "I wanted much. I began much. But the gale of the world blew away me and my work."

The gale of the world had been blowing hard in these fateful years. It had blown away Hitler and Mussolini and the whole apparatus of Nazi and Fascist government. It had blown away the once famous and successful Nazi leaders: Streicher and von Ribbentrop were among those executed after trial by an Allied War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg; Hess, Doenitz and others were sentenced to terms of imprisonment; and Himmler, the fiend of the concentration camps, avoided just retribution by committing suicide after his capture by American soldiers. Goering, too, who was sentenced to death at Nuremberg, escaped hanging by suicide.

The gale had blown traitors to death after fair trial by their countrymen—Quisling in Norway, Laval in France; old Pétain, who was nearly 90 when he was tried, was sentenced to life imprisonment. It had blown kings from their thrones and had split Germany into two parts, of which Eastern Germany was behind Stalin's Iron Curtain and Western Germany was in close touch (soon to become a formal alliance) with the Western Allies. Years after the war had ended the gale of the world was still blowing.

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